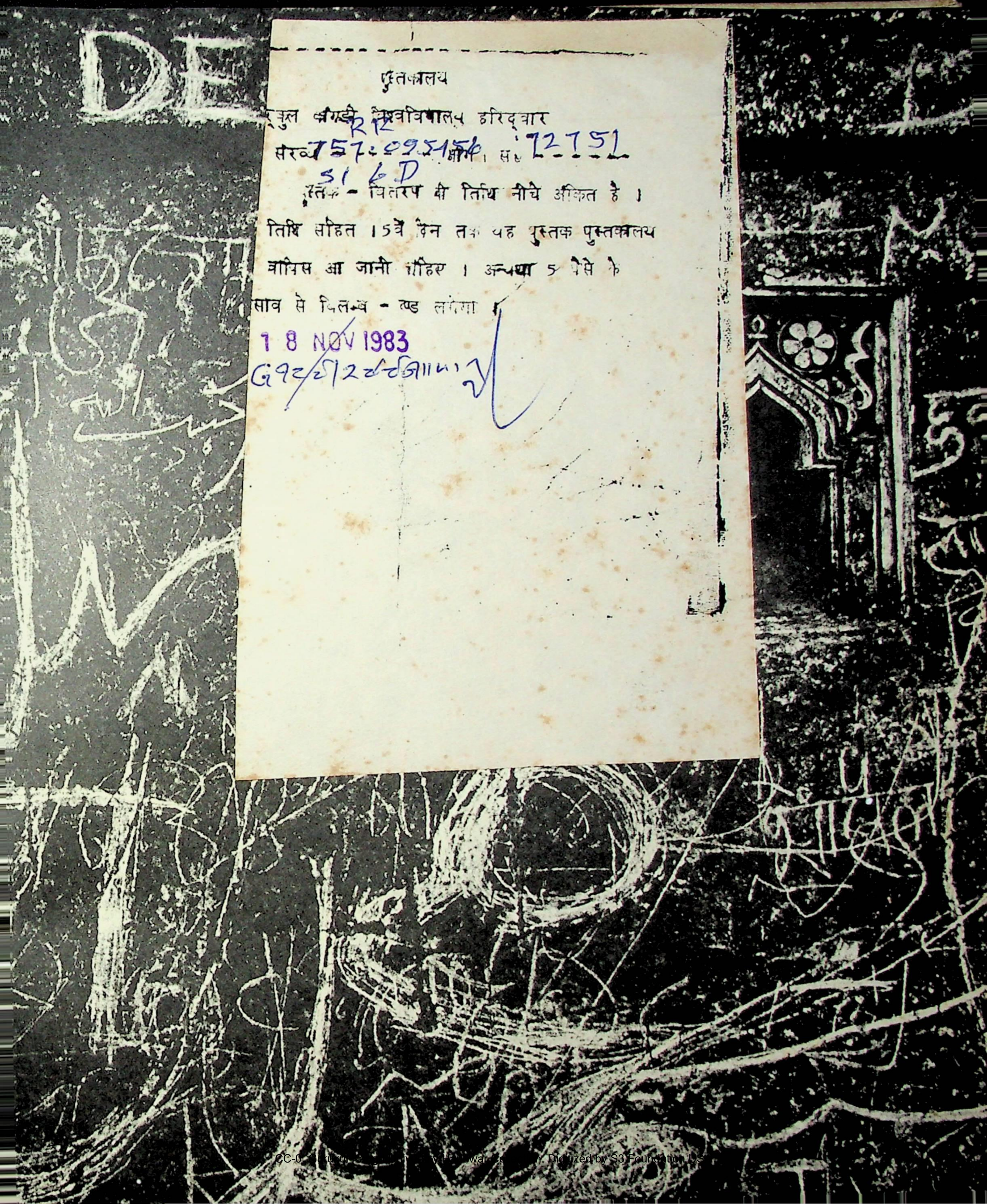
S-4




DE

DELHI
A Portrait

DELHI
A Portrait

KHUSHWANT SINGH
&
RAGHU RAI

Delhi Tourism Development Corporation
•
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
DELHI BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS
1983

Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

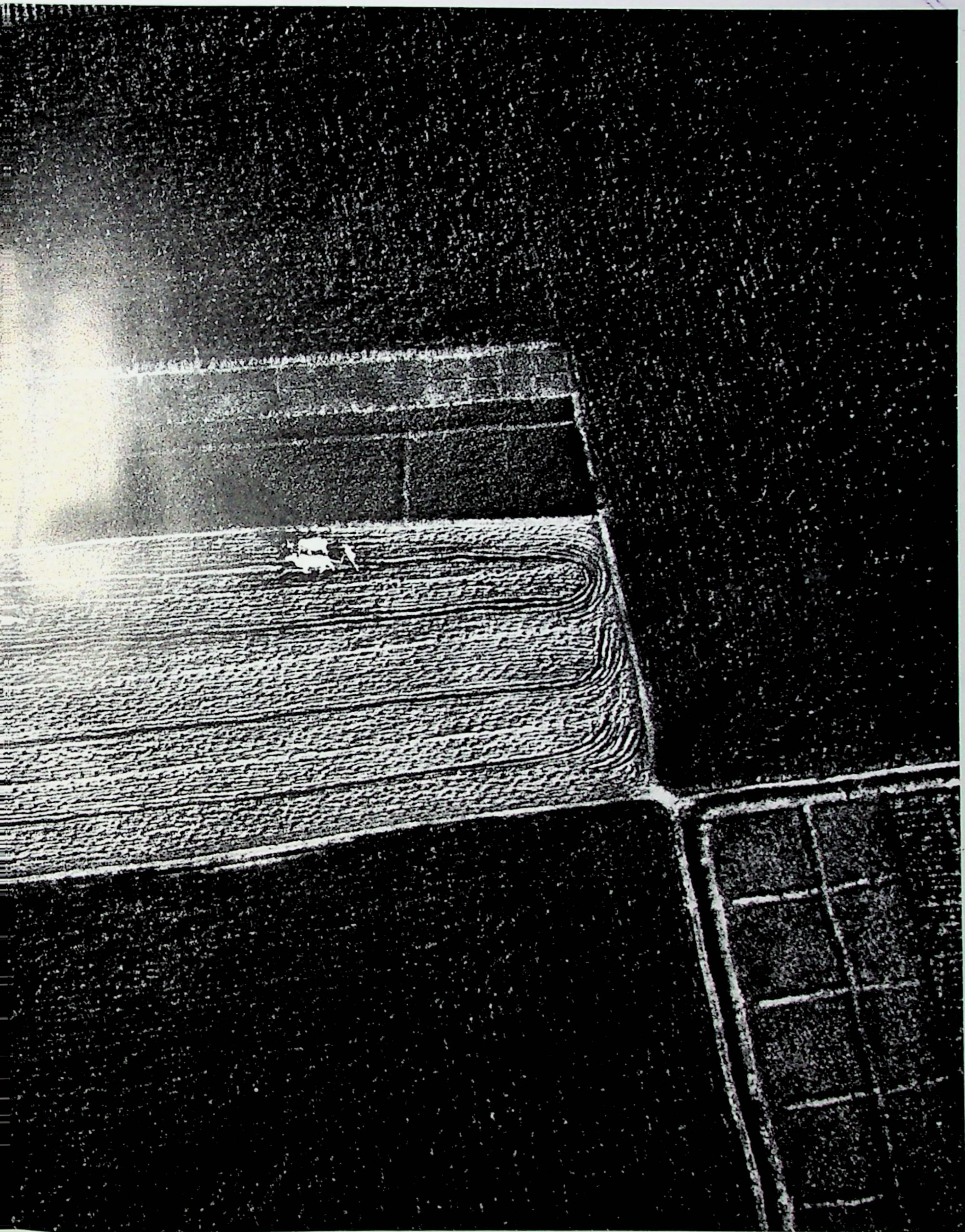
LONDON GLASGOW NEW YORK TORONTO
DELHI BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS KARACHI
KUALA LUMPUR SINGAPORE HONG KONG TOKYO
NAIROBI DAR ES SALAAM CAPE TOWN
MELBOURNE AUCKLAND
and associates in
BEIRUT BERLIN IBADAN MEXICO CITY

Printed in Hong Kong
by Hip Shing Printing Factory
and published by R. Dayal, Oxford University Press
2/11 Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110002

I asked my soul, what is Delhi?
She replied: The world is the body and Delhi its soul
—Asadullah Khan Ghalib



Aerial approach to Delhi





Landing at Palam Airport: the jet age co-exists with rural India

DELHI

Arrival

From the window seat of a plane circling over Delhi to land at Palam airport you can get a good view of the landscape. If you look carefully you will notice that the city lies between a large triangle formed by the river Yamuna on the east, a series of jagged ridges on the west and a pancake flat plain to the south. On the northern side is the last walled city of Delhi with its Red Fort, the royal mosque and congested bazaars. Between what is called the old city and the airport lies New Delhi with acres of green, wide tree-lined avenues branching off from roundabouts, massive stone buildings, a few sky-scrapers and rows of bungalows laid out amidst spacious lawns. In the midst of these you may catch glimpses of tumble-down forts and marble domes. You will realize at a glance that you are coming to a city which is at once as ancient as it is modern. 'The cobble-stones of this great city', said Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, 'whisper the glory of past centuries.' Georges Pompidou, the former President of France on a visit to Delhi in 1965, described the city as a 'crucible where hopes of the present blend with the traditions of the past'.

The bird's eye view will also explain why successions of rulers of India chose this site above others to be the seat of their governments. It is over 960 kilometres from the passes in the Hindukush and Sulaiman mountains, through which warlike tribes from Central Asia made periodical incursions into the plains of Hindustan. It took invading armies over a month to traverse the distance, by which time Delhi would be ready to defend itself. The ridge, the last of the Aravali range, gave the people of Delhi the illusion of having a western battlement and the river Yamuna an eastern moat. The river also assured them of potable water throughout the year, with enough to spare to irrigate the fertile hinterland. The illusion of invulnerability was shattered many times. One city of Delhi after another was ransacked and its citizens put to sword by the thousands. But the people of Delhi refused to budge. When one city was destroyed, out of its rubble they raised another and repopulated it. The legend grew that he who held Delhi held India. Every conqueror did his best to possess Delhi and make it his capital.

Delhi was by no means the best site for the seat of the empire of Hindustan. However fortuitous the choice, once made it was rarely questioned. It would seem as if these acres of land between the rocky ridge and the river had acquired some sort of sanctity in the eyes of the people. The Yamuna no doubt had a lot to do with it. She was Kalindi or Sarjuga, daughter of the Sun. She was also the sister of Yama, King of Death. She was attractive enough for Krishna's brother Balaram to desire her. When she rejected his overtures, he grabbed her by her hair, dragged her zig-zag across the plains and dumped her into the Ganga. Eighty miles downstream from Delhi it was on the banks of the Yamuna that Vishnu reincarnated as Krishna dallied with village maidens, played his flute bewitching man and beast alike and

destroyed many demons including the hydra-headed serpent Kaliya, who lived in the bottom of the river. Once when the Yamuna was in spate, the flood waters threw up the sacred Shastras on the right bank not far from where the river first encountered the Aravali range. They named the bank *(ghat) Nigambodh* (sacred knowledge). It was an omen that this was the best site to raise a city for the God of all gods. So rose *Indraprastha*—the abode of Indra, lord of the firmament.

Indraprastha was the progenitor of many cities of Delhi. Some say there were seven old cities of Delhi and New Delhi is the eighth. Others say there were fifteen old cities and New Delhi is the sixteenth. Nobody is sure of the number of Delhis. No one knows when human habitation was first established around Delhi. Pieces of baked earthenware and grey pottery unearthed in the region would take it back to 1000 B.C. or earlier; stone inscriptions confirm the existence of a city around 300 B.C. You can examine the bric-á-brac collected by archaeologists at the National Museum and at the Purana Qila, said to be the site of the first city of Delhi, Indraprastha. The stone inscription is where it was found in present day Lajpat Nagar. One can safely conclude that Delhi is one of the oldest living cities of the world.

There has been considerable speculation about the origin of the odd-sounding name, Delhi (pronounced *Dehlee* by the literati, *Dilli* by the hoi-polloi). Some say it is derived from the Persian *Dehleez* or Hindi *Dehali*—threshold, because it was the gateway to the Gangetic plains. Ptolemy, the Alexandrian geographer, refers to it as *Daidalas*. Ferishta, the Persian historian writing in the sixteenth century A.D., traces it to Dhillika, the capital of one Raja Dhelu of whom nothing is known besides his name. There is also an amusing anecdote which connects the name with the famous Iron Pillar near the Qutab. It was designed to be the standard of Vishnu and meant to be implanted into the hood of the celestial serpent on which the earth rests. At the same time a curse was pronounced on anyone who tampered with it. The Tomara prince who had the pillar installed in Delhi wanted to make sure that it had been planted deep enough to enter the hood of the snake and had it dug up. The base was found to be smeared with the serpent's blood. The curse took its baneful course and the Tomara dynasty was undone. The event was recorded in doggerel:

Keelee to dheelee bhaee
Tomar bhava mat heen
The pillar was loosened
And the Tomar lost his head.

Those who don't like the people of Delhi say that the city deserves its name *Dheeley* (loose), because, ever since the incident, Dilliwallas have had a loose screw in their heads. At any rate, of all the impressive-sounding names—Indraprastha, Yoginipura, Lal Kot, Siri, Kilokheri, Chiragh, Jahanpanah (haven of the world), Tughlakabad, Firozabad or Kotla Feroze Shah, Mubarakabad, Deen Panah (haven of faith) and Shahjahanabad—it is only Delhi that has survived.

'It is a long way to Delhi—*Hunooz Dilli Door Ast*,' said Hazrat Nizamuddin (d. 1325), regarded by many as the patron saint of the city. But that was meant for a

Sultan who was marching to Delhi with evil designs against him. Delhi is only a few hours' flight from Europe, and another few hours more from America. And no sooner the visitor lands at Palam, he is in fact in Delhi. Palam is about 15 kilometres from the heart of the new city and was at times the outside limit of the domain of the rulers of Delhi. Three Sultans of Delhi whose kingdom did not extend beyond Palam assumed the grandiloquent title Shah Alam (king of the universe) and since their names rhymed with the name of their frontier village they were lampooned in verse:

Sultanat Shah Alam
Az Dilli ta Palam
The Kingdom of Shah Alam
Extends from Delhi to Palam

From Palam a broad dual highway divided by a strip of bougainvillaea sweeps through farmlands to housing colonies with multi-storeyed government flats and large private bungalows to the diplomatic enclave into the centre of New Delhi.

The Beginnings

Delhi is history. Delhi is monuments. Delhi's monuments are tablets on which its history is written. And Delhi is people who wrote its history on those tablets. You may find history a bore: you may have had a surfeit of dates, dynasties and names of kings. You may find forts, palaces, mosques and mausoleums look much the same and may have concluded that if you've seen one you've seen them all. But people are always interesting and what the people of Delhi did in these forts, palaces and mosques makes these monuments equally interesting. They are also some of the finest examples of architecture you can see anywhere in the world.

Delhi has 1,300 monuments which have been officially declared as being of historical importance. It has many more which are only 'protected' from further destruction. And there are yet others which though they neither qualify as 'historic' or 'protected' are equally fascinating. Almost every narrow lane in the walled city has some relic or the other which will arrest the visitor's attention. Small, dilapidated doors open into courtyards heavy with entrapped odours of jasmine, moulsari and roses; in the middle may be a well or a pigeon loft loud with the guttural cooing of strutting powter pigeons. You will discover temples and mosques in the most unexpected places. Every *peepul* tree (*ficus religiosa*) and spreading banyan will have an assortment of stone gods and beside them an ash-smeared sadhu smoking his *chillum* by a smouldering fire. Some lanes have craftsmen whose forefathers were engaged in the same craft three centuries ago. Such are the kite-makers who, besides making kites, specialize in producing strings smeared with powdered glass; and the men and women who beat pellets of silver and gold into gossamer thinness to cover Indian delicacies. There are streets specializing in *parathas* (a chapati fried in ghee) and rows of sweetmeat vendors' shops claiming descent from caterers to the

Mughal kings. And not far from them silversmiths, goldsmiths and workers in ivory. Pervading all these are the smells of the bazaar—a fetid odour of sunless streets mixed with urine, asafoetida and other spices.

The same applies to New Delhi and its environments. There are unmarked tombs, mosques, *baolis,* remains of palaces and fortifications wherever you go. The Delhi Golf Club has its pavilion alongside two eighteenth-century tombs made of red sandstone and marble. Alongside the fairways are tombs and pavilions whose identity goes no further than guesswork from the style of architecture. Often when the ground is dug up to lay the foundations of a building, figurines of Hindu gods and goddesses, Shiva lingas, or old coins are found. There are many places marked with triangular emblems of the archaeological department to indicate that the site has been earmarked for excavation. The story of Delhi's past continues to be rewritten.

A little historical background may be necessary to place monuments in the period they were built, the people who built them and explain the changing styles of architecture. We do not have to go too far back into the Hindu period because little of what was then built in Delhi remains. There are the relics found in Indraprastha and a couple of Asokan pillars (*circa* 300 B.C.) which were brought from elsewhere to be replanted in Delhi. Besides these, there are the ruins of Anangpur, Suraj Kund and Qila Rai Pithora built by the Tomara and Chauhan Rajputs between the seventh to twelfth centuries A.D. The rest of Delhi's surviving monuments were built by Muslim rulers after they captured the city in A.D. 1192. Various Muslim dynasties ruled over Delhi till 1857 when the last Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, was dethroned by the British and banished to Rangoon to die in exile. Thereafter, the British ruled India till 1947. They built most of New Delhi. The rulers of independent India made it into the metropolis that it is today.

Seven Muslim dynasties ruled Delhi: the Ghoris, usually referred to as the Slave Sultans (1192–1290), the Khiljis (1290–1320), the Tughlaks (1320–1414), the Saiyyads (1414–51), the Lodis (1451–1526), the Suris (1538–55) and the Mughals (1526-1857, apart from the brief gap during the Suri interregnum).

Let us commence our historical survey with what remains of the buildings of the Hindu Rajput tribes, the Tomaras and the Chauhans. They are to be found in the southernmost extremity of Delhi nestling in a range of rocky hills.

Suraj Kund, Anangpur and Qila Rai Pithora

The Delhi-Agra dual highway passes an old fortified village called Badarpur. Instead of continuing on the highway, turn sharp right. You may have to wait a while at a railway level crossing because upwards of 50 trains pass over these tracks every 24 hours. A few yards beyond the level crossing turn sharp left and proceed southwards. Suddenly the ground becomes uneven and you find yourself in a terrain of rock and ravine. And as suddenly, you find yourself at Suraj Kund. It is a vast Romanesque type of circular amphitheatre with broad stairs leading down to a pool of water. *Suraj* (sun) *Kund* (pool) may have derived its name from its builder

Suraj Pal or from the temple which stood atop its western end with its entrance facing east to catch the first rays of the rising sun. The best time to visit Suraj Kund is in February when the Flame, the Salvadora (*piloo*) and the Caparis which grow in profusion are in flower. A footpath takes you through the boulder-strewn country to a dam designed to supply water to the pool. It was built by another chieftain, Anangpal, whose township Anangpur can be seen further southwards. When the mustard is in flower the land between the dam and Anangpur is a sea of yellow with rocky islands dotted in between. Skylarks trill away in the blue skies and peacocks which abound can be seen scuttling through the fields. Anangpur and the little farmsteads are inhabited by *gujjars* (cattle-breeders). At different places you will come across ruins of what must have been the town's fortifications or a palace. All we know about Anangpal is that he was a Rajput, he built Lal Kot around where the Qutab Minar stands today and he brought the famous Iron Pillar to Delhi. It was probably his curiosity regarding the base of the pillar that according to popular legend destroyed his dynasty, the Tomaras.

Not very long ago, Suraj Kund used to be in splendid isolation. Today it has become a very popular picnic spot. You can escape the picnickers with their transistor sets by exploring the countryside. If you are lucky you may chance upon a stray *nilgai*, a wild pig or a black buck. Peafowl are in plenty. During monsoon time you may see the male display its glorious plumage while performing his courtship dance.

The more exciting story of Delhi begins with the next Rajput dynasty, the Chauhans—specifically its hero-king Rai Pithora, also known as Prithviraj Chauhan. He enlarged Anangpal's Lal Kot and it came to be known after him as Qila Rai Pithora. The remains of its battlements can still be seen around Qutab Minar. It is difficult to sift historical fact from legend, particularly when most of what we know about Prithviraj is derived from the pen of the poet Chand Bardai who wrote a very moving epic called *Prithvi Raj Raso*. According to Bardai, Prithviraj was a handsome and dashing young cavalier with an eye for beautiful women. He was not on good terms with a neighbouring prince, Jai Chand, but was enamoured of Jai Chand's daughter, Sanjogta. When time came for Sanjogta to marry, her father invited all the eligible princes of the neighbourhood except Prithviraj. In order to make it quite clear what he thought of him, Jai Chand had an effigy of Prithviraj put outside the palace gate. As was the custom of the times, Princess Sanjogta bearing a garland of flowers in her hands went round the assemblage of expectant would-be-bridegrooms and put it round the neck of the effigy of Prithviraj. Prithviraj, who had an inkling about this, was waiting nearby with a band of chosen horsemen. No sooner did Princess Sanjogta put the garland round his effigy, than he lifted her on to his saddle and galloped back to Delhi.

Jai Chand swore vengeance. When Turkish armies under Mohammed Ghori (1175–1206) invaded India in 1191 he refused to join Prithviraj to defend the country. In the first encounter at Tarrain, 80 kilometres north-west of Delhi, Prithviraj trounced and captured Ghori. Being a gallant Rajput he let his adversary go free. A year later Ghori returned and once again on the same battlefield Prithviraj

measured swords with Ghori. This time Prithviraj was defeated, captured and beheaded.

Mohammed Ghori did not bother to come to Delhi himself but sent his slave and general, Qutubuddin Aibak, to take the country on his behalf. Aibak stormed Qila Rai Pithora, ransacked the city and became viceroy of his Ghori master. Ghori died (1206) without any issue. 'I have a thousand sons,' he said referring to his Turkish slaves. Qutubuddin proclaimed himself the first Sultan of Delhi. Thus Delhi had a dynasty of Slave Sultans.

Qutubuddin Aibak was a ruthless man who 'bestowed by 100,000 and slaughtered by 100,000' and hence came to be known as *lakhbaksh*. He was an odd combination of a vandal and a builder. He destroyed much of the Delhi built by the Tomara and Chauhan Rajputs, but with the same material and with the help of Hindu craftsmen raised mosques, minarets and mausoleums.

Having conquered much of north India in the name of Islam, Aibak set about destroying all vestiges of idolatry that he could find. A contemporary chronicler wrote: 'The conqueror entered the city, and its vicinity was freed from idols and idol worship, and in the sanctuaries of the images of the gods, mosques were raised by the worshippers of The One God.'[1] Amongst the buildings he destroyed were twenty-seven Hindu and Jain temples in Qila Rai Pithora. All that remains of them are colonnades on which you can still discern mutilated faces and limbs of Hindu gods and goddesses and chains with bells hanging from them. These temples he converted into a mosque, the first to be raised in northern India, which later came to be known appropriately as the Might of Islam (*Quwwat-ul-Islam*) Mosque. He then began to build the Qutab Minar.

The Qutab is the most spectacular of Delhi's monuments. What the Eiffel Tower is to Paris, the Statue of Liberty to New York and Big Ben for London, the Qutab Minar is to Delhi: it is the emblem of the city and much more beautiful than the emblems of other cities.

We are not sure whether the Qutab derives its name from Qutubuddin Aibak or from a contemporary saint, Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, who is buried in nearby Mehrauli. It could also be from the Arabic *Qutab* for pole, axis or pivot (of the Faith). It was designed 'to cast the shadow of God over the east and over the west'. Its 72.5 metres certainly cast a long and impressive shadow at sunrise and sunset. The first three storeys are made of red sandstone; the fourth and fifth have bands of white marble round them. Qutubuddin Aibak was able to build only the first storey; the second and third were added by his son-in-law and successor, Altamash. When the upper storeys were struck by lightning in 1368, Firoz Tughlak (1351–88) added two more. At one time a cupola which sat atop the Minar crashed down in an earthquake. Major Smith, an English engineer, replaced it with another which looked so ridiculously like a Sahib's sola topee that it had to be taken off. You can see it in the garden below near a sundial.

The Qutab is festooned with writing in Arabic. It should be noticed that the letters on the higher elevations are considerably larger than those on lower levels so that they can be read from the ground. The first storey has lines paying tribute to

Aibak's sovereign, Mohammed Ghori, some verses from the holy Quran and the 99 names of Allah. The name of Altamash appears on the upper storeys. It is apparent that Hindu craftsmen were employed to build the Qutab Minar. They not only imposed their notions of ornate decoration on the calligraphy but also left some inscriptions in Devanagri to establish their identity.

The Qutab Minar, which has its prototype in Ghazni, is said to have been designed as a tower of victory as well as for the muezzin to call the faithful to prayer. It could have served muezzin while it had only the first storey built by Aibak, but after it was completed it could only serve as a victory memorial. It is hard enough to climb its 379 steps once in the day; and shout as much as you like from its top storey only Allah will be able to hear you.

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in his pioneering work on the monuments of Delhi (*Asar us Sanadeed*) expressed the view that there was a Hindu tower in existence on which Qutubuddin Aibak raised the present Minar. He based his theory on a comparison of the Qutab with the unfinished minar about a hundred yards to the north built by Alauddin Khilji (1296-1316). The Alai (after Alauddin) Minar stands on a plinth and has its entrance facing east, whereas the Qutab, like towers made by the Hindus, has no plinth and has its entrance facing north. Historians and students of architecture reject Sir Syed's thesis. The only interesting feature of the Alai Minar is that it shows how minars like the Qutab were made. First a solid column was planted; then a large hollow stone and mortar tube, leaving enough space to accommodate a spiral staircase constructed around it. Sculptured stone was later 'pasted' on the outside of the tube.

At one time people were allowed to climb to the top of the Qutab Minar. You got a spectacular view of the countryside below: on the northern horizon you could see New Delhi and beyond it the old Mughal city with its Royal Mosque and the Red Fort; on the eastern side you could see Tughlakabad, the tomb of its builder Ghiasuddin Tughlak and beyond them the silver streak of the river Yamuna; on the other two sides were low ranges of the Aravali hills dotted with innumerable ruins. Unfortunately, the Qutab Minar became a favourite with people who wanted to kill themselves. Ultimately on the pretext that the Minar could not take the strain of too many visitors climbing up and down its stairs, the authorities restricted access to only the first floor.

The Qutab has withstood several earthquakes. You will notice small slabs of glass with dates inscribed on their cement frames. These are to record earth tremors and damage, if any, done to the monument.

The Quwwat-ul-Islam was the first mosque to be built in Delhi. An inscription on the entrance records Qutubuddin Aibak's destroying Jain and Hindu temples and converting the area into a mosque. It took him four years (1193–7) to complete it. The Hindu relics, including an idol of Ganapati in the southern wall of the moat as well as elaborate ornamental Arabic writing on the western end, are clearly the work of Hindu craftsmen. It should also be noticed that the arches have no corner stone and were obviously made by Hindu artisans unfamiliar with the technique of arch-making.

The mosque was increased in size by Qutubuddin's successor, Altamash, and the courtyard enlarged to include the Qutab Minar. These additions have more of the Saracenic than the Hindu in their embellishment. The mosque was further extended by Alauddin Khilji who also built large entrances of which only one, the Alai Darwaza, remains.

Before we explore other monuments, it may be profitable to note some features of mosques and tombs on which most Muslim rulers concentrated their building skills.

The Arabic word for mosque is *masjid*, the place where one performs *sijdah*—prostration before Allah. It was initially like an Arab home and consisted of an open courtyard (*sehn*) with cloisters (*liwan*) on the sides. A water tank was installed in the middle for worshippers to perform their ablutions (*vuzoo*). In India the prayer wall of the mosque is on the western side with an alcove (*mihrab*) indicating the direction (*qibla*) so that worshippers facing it face the holy city of Mecca. The *mihrab* in the wall is usually decorated with verses from the Quran and the word Allah appears framed at different places. There is also a stone pulpit (*mimbar*) from where the Imam delivered his sermon. Most, but not all, mosques have a minaret for the muezzin to call the faithful to prayer. In every big town, the largest mosque is known as the Jama Masjid (from *Al-masajid al jami*, the collecting mosque). It is also known as the *Juma* (Friday) mosque, Friday being the day for congregational prayer.

A Muslim tomb differs from the Christian in several ways. A Christian tomb may be laid in any direction; a Muslim tomb in India is invariably laid north-south so that the deceased person's face can be turned towards Mecca. Unlike Christian tombs, Muslim tombs seldom bear a headstone or an epitaph but are usually decorated with verses from the Quran. This makes it impossible to identify them. Often (but not invariably) a male tomb will carry a conical-shaped *qalamdan* (pen-holder) and the female a *takhti*, or the wooden writing board used by school children in India. The cenotaph (*zarih*) of tombs of royalty are usually in the centre of the tomb chamber (*huzrah*) and often have an imitation tomb on top while the real grave (*qabr*) is in the mortuary chamber below. (Incidentally the Arabic *qabr* gave the English language the word macabre.) This was done to allow visitors to pay homage without disturbing the peace of the dead person. After the tomb of Khan Jahan Tilangani (d. 1369), the chief minister of Firoz Tughlak, it became customary for royalty and the aristocracy to make octagonal mausoleums for themselves.

Muslims preferred to be buried near the tombs of holy men so that on the day of judgement they could intercede on their behalf. The two most revered Muslim saints of Delhi were Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki and Hazrat Nizamuddin. It will be noticed that the tombs of a large number of Muslim rulers, princes of royal blood and the omarah are either near the mausoleum of Bakhtiyar Kaki in Mehrauli or in the vicinity of Nizamuddin's in New Delhi.

Foreign visitors may be intrigued with the six-pointed Star of David which appears on several Muslim monuments. We are not sure when it made its first

appearance in India but there is little doubt that it has no Judaic connection. In all probability it is the symbolic representation of the six seasons which Hindu craftsmen freely used to embellish gateways and arches.

Let us return to the Qutab Minar. Some other monuments in the complex deserve attention. One is the tomb of Altamash built by himself in A.D. 1235 and the other is the Alai Darwaza entrance to the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque alongside the Qutab Minar. The dome of Altamash's tomb is no longer there but the ornate Arabic writing in Tughra, Kufi and Naskh styles on the western wall is well preserved. It is likely that Altamash started the custom of having the real tomb in a vault below and its imitation on the floor above. The earliest example of this is to be found in the tomb he built for his son Nasiruddin who was killed in a campaign in 1229. This tomb is a couple of kilometres west along the Mehrauli–Gurgaon road and is aptly described as *Sultan Ghari* (the Sultan in the cave). Altamash took the material from Hindu temples believed to have been there. Hindu inscriptions and emblems have been located in many Muslim buildings in the area: a yoni emblem can be seen embedded near the floor of the western wall of Sultan Ghari's mosque.

The Alai Darwaza was the southern gate of the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque enlarged by Alauddin Khilji. It has an enormous dome covering the entrance hall and four gates, of which the eastern has a felicitous mingling of stones of different colours on which verses from the Quran are inscribed. Besides the eastern entrance of Alai Darwaza is a small mausoleum of a Turkish divine, Imam Zamin, who was probably attached in some official capacity to the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque. He built this tomb for himself in 1538 and was laid in it a year later.

The *piéce de rèsistance* in the Qutab complex is the Iron Pillar which has withstood the elements for over 1,500 years without rusting. At one time the pillar had a *Garuda* (the eagle on which Vishnu rode) on its crown. This was removed by the Muslims. There are two styles of writing on the pillar which have been deciphered as an eulogy of Chandragupta who lived in the fourth and fifth centuries. An English translation of the inscription can be seen close by. For reasons unknown people stand with their backs to the pillar and try to encircle it with their hands. Some say if you succeed your wishes will be granted. Amongst the bawdy, the belief is that those who fail to get their hands to meet are not legitimate offspring.

The Qutab is the most visited monument of Delhi. On holidays, the crowds make it difficult to imbibe the atmosphere of the place. It is best to book accommodation in the guest house (which also provides meals) and, after the crowds are gone, take a leisurely stroll round the monuments. Moonlight casts bewitching shadows in the courtyard of the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque and produces a feeling of infinite melancholy.

Equally rewarding is a stroll through the ruins lying southwards of the Qutab complex. The road from the Qutab to Gurgaon makes a wide arc and rises gently uphill to a plateau full of mango orchards, to meet the road coming out of the gate of Mehrauli. The town is on an elevation and at one time its reservoir, Shamsi Talab, supplied water to the buildings below. These consisted of some pleasure gardens with waterfalls, an open air tank and several mansions. Most of these buildings are

now derelict. It must have been the kind of scenery which made Lord Curzon describe Delhi as 'a deserted city of dreary and disconsolate tombs'. There are a couple of *baolis* with rooms on the sides and steps leading down to where water once was. The ruins of the tomb and palace of Emperor Balban (1266–86) which could only be located with the help of a guide until recently have now been excavated to reveal the remnants of what must have been a handsome building. Only two mosques with tombs are in a fair state of preservation. One is of the poet Shaikh Fazlullah, known by his *nom de plume* Jamali Kamali (d. 1536). The grave chamber still has the poet's Persian verses on its walls. Close by is an earlier construction, Madhi Masjid, which resembles a fortress. There is little besides these except ruin upon ruin with caparis and vasicka bushes sprouting out of them. The open air tank is now a few puddles of water where women of Mehrauli do their washing. A Jain temple of considerable antiquity but little architectural merit stands on a mound. A walled enclosure has been converted into a Buddhist vihara and a Youth Hostel gone up alongside it.

The visitor will be intrigued by a pair of English-style towers standing atop a boulder across the Mehrauli bypass. These were once the entrances of a house built in 1844 by Thomas Metcalfe who was Resident at the Mughal court. He converted the tomb of Mohammed Quli Khan which is close to the Qutab restaurant into a sizeable mansion which he named Dilkusha—pleasing to the heart. Metcalfe had grandiose notions of his status and styled himself '*Sahib-i-vala, Managube Ali Mansib, Farzand Arjmand, bajan paivand-e-sultani, Muassamadaulah Amin-ul-Mulk, Ikhtizas Yar Khan,* Sir Thomas Metcalfe, Baron Bahadur, Firoze Jung, Sahib Kalan Bahadur of Shahjahanabad'. Not long after Metcalfe's death his Dilkusha crumbled to dust. Only the two incongruous towers remain in their master's memory and his mansion came to be known as 'Metcalfe's Folly'.

Mehrauli has several interesting monuments. At the Qutab end of the township is the octagonal two-storied tomb of Adham Khan, foster brother of Emperor Akbar. He slew a rival and tried to lay his hands on the Emperor's person. Akbar had him hurled down the wall of the Red Fort of Agra. His mother, Maham Anaga, built his tomb (she also built a mosque and madrassa opposite the Purana Qila). Adham Khan's tomb is a great favourite with children because its many entrances are a kind of maze and are known as *bhool bhulaiyan* (lose your way). Behind Adham Khan's tomb is the temple of Jogmaya, after which Delhi was once known as Yoginipura. Nothing of the old temple remains except the name and stone idol. At the end of the Mehrauli bazaar there are the remains of Shamsi Talab, the once-large pool already referred to. The legend goes that Shamsuddin (hence *Shamsi*) Altamash dreamt of the Prophet Mohammed alighting from his horse at this spot. So he decided to consecrate it by digging a tank to provide water for Mehrauli and the adjacent mango orchards. He got water from Zamr Zam in Arabia and poured it in the pond. A small white mosque (Auliya Masjid) which was raised on the side of the pool became the resort of Muslim mystics. Amongst those known to have performed forty days of prayer and meditation (*chilla*) were Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki and Hazrat Nizamuddin. Close to the Auliya Masjid is the Jahaz Mahal

(ship palace) built during Lodi rule (1451-1526). Every year after the monsoon, a colourful procession *Phool walon ki sair* or *Sair-i-gul farohan*—flower-sellers' promenade—led by *shehnai* players and dancers wends its way from the temple of Jogmaya, through the Mehrauli bazaar to place curtains made of flowers on the tomb of Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki. It is one of the few festivals in which both Hindus and Muslims participate with equal fervour.

The enclosure round Kaki's tomb is well worth a visit. Muslims from distant countries come here on pilgrimage. Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki (d. 1236) or Qutub Sahib as he is popularly known earned the sobriquet Kaki because during long hours of meditation he forgot to eat and had to be fed with cakes—*kaki*. He succeeded Mueenuddin of Ajmer as the head of the Chishtiya order of Sufi mystics. People tie coloured strings to the trellis-work to ask favours of the saint. On his death anniversary (*urs*) *qawwalis* are sung and the poor fed. Village boys also entertain visitors by jumping into an adjoining *baoli* from dizzy heights. For those interested in Indian history, in a nearby courtyard there are tombs of several kings and princes of the Mughal dynasty including that of Bahadur Shah I (d. 1712), Shah Alam II (1759–1806) and Akbar II (1806–37). The royal graveyard has gory associations. Bahadur Shah I had died waging a long, unavailing struggle against Banda Bahadur and his Sikh bands. His son, Farrukhsiyyar, succeeded in capturing Banda and brought him with hundreds of Sikhs in chains to Delhi. After torturing them for many months, he had them paraded before his father's grave and then beheaded. Local Sikhs have named one of the streets in Mehrauli after their hero as *Shaheed* (martyr) Banda Bahadur Street.

In January 1948 a part of the marble screen round Kaki's tomb was damaged by an irate mob of Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan. Four days before his assassination Mahatma Gandhi came to Kaki's tomb to pray for forgiveness for those who had violated the sanctity of his mausoleum.

A Poet's Delhi

'Delhi is famous the world over for being the centre of Islam and Justice. . . . It can very well be compared to the Garden of Aram in Paradise. . . . It is situated in a hilly country, gardens surround it for three kilometres and the river Yamuna flows nearby. There are three cities of Delhi. Two are old and the third one is new. By old Delhi is meant the old fort and the boundary wall of the city and new Delhi is the newly founded city of Kilokheri near the river Yamuna.'

This praise of Delhi was written by Abul Hasan Yaminuddin, known as Amir Khusrau—poet, musician (inventor of the sitar and many *ragas* of Indian music), soldier, courtier and Sufi mystic all rolled in one. Khusrau (1253-1325) served eight rulers and yet was the closest disciple of Hazrat Nizamuddin who disdained the company of kings. Khusrau's parting advice to his son was: 'Don't be like me who is always weaving a false story in every reign.'

Nizamuddin's hospice in the village of Ghiaspur on the right bank of the Yamuna was quite a distance from the two old and the new city of Delhi that Khusrau wrote about. Today the same hospice (opposite the Lodi Hotel) with its mosques, graves

of kings, princesses and poets and its *baoli* finds itself in a cross-section of dual higways, and in the midst of bazaars and bungalows of the rich. Ghiaspur has disappeared; the locality is known as Nizamuddin. But once inside the sacred precincts, particularly on the death anniversaries *(urs)* of Nizamuddin or Khusrau who died within a few days of each other in 1325, you get a flavour of the religious fervour that must have animated it nearly seven hundred years ago.

Amir Khusrau was not a modest man. Hazrat Nizamuddin gave him the title *toot-i-hind,* the nightingale of India. Khusrau adduced many arguments to buttress his self-esteem. 'I have praised India for two reasons', he wrote. 'Firstly, because it is my birthplace and my country. Patriotism is itself a great religion. Secondly, because Sultan Qutubuddin Mubarak Shah is king of this country.' After giving a long list of items that made India a paradise on earth, Khusrau concluded,' 'And lastly, the greatness of India is testified by the fact that Amir Khusrau, the greatest poet of the court, hails from India.' And this at a time when according to Khusrau himself 'every stone of Delhi concealed a gem of literary brilliance'.

Khusrau's praise for Qutubuddin Mubarak Shah need not be taken too seriously because he was in the habit of writing *qaseedas* (eulogies) for every master he served. But there is a ring of sincerity in the songs he composed in praise of Nizamuddin. You can hear them sung in *qawwali* style all over India and Pakistan. Besides composing verse in Persian and Hindi and writing many books of prose, Khusrau also concocted riddles which have been popular with Indian children over the centuries. Try this one:

Twenty I sliced, I cut off their heads
But no life was lost, no blood was shed.

The answer is 'paring of the nails'. The key word is *nakhoon* which means nails, but, if broken into two, *na khoon*, it means 'no blood'. Another popular riddle for adults runs as follows:

All night with me he spent
Came the dawn; and out he went.
At his going my heart was ripped apart.
Friend, think you it was my sweet-heart?
No my friend, it was only the oil lamp.

The most quoted of Khusrau lines were the last composed by him. He was in Uttar Pradesh when Nizamuddin died. On hearing the news he hurried back to Delhi. When he reached the hospice he was told that Nizamuddin had left instructions that Khusrau was not to be allowed near his grave lest he break the ordinance of God by rising from his grave to embrace him. Khusrau stood beside a fragrant *kewra* bush and with tears streaming down his eyes sang:

On her couch sleeps my fair one
Her hair are scattered over her face.
O Khusrau, 'tis time you too the homeward path did tread
The shades of twilight about the world are spread.

A few days later Khusrau died and was buried at the spot where he had recited the lines quoted above.

When Khusrau was born (1253) the first woman ruler of India, Razia Sultana, the daughter of Altamash, had been dead thirteen years. But her affairs with her Ethiopian slave and Turkish paramour were undoubtedly still the talk of Hindustan. (Razia Sultana's grave is in an obscure courtyard in a bazaar behind Turkman Gate.) Khusrau served for many years under Prince Mohammad, the son of Balban who had wrested the sultanate from the hands of Altamash's descendants and ruled Hindustan with an iron hand for twenty years till his death in 1286. Khusrau was there when Jalaluddin Feroze (1290–5), the first Sultan of the Khilji dynasty, built the *Shahr-i-nau* (new city) at Kilokheri, and when Jalaluddin's nephew and son-in-law, Alauddin Khilji, had his uncle murdered. Alauddin Khilji ruled northern India for twenty years (1296–1316). Ibn-i-Batuta of Tangiers who spent eight years in Delhi wrote that although Alauddin was 'one of the best Sultans' he also 'shed more innocent blood than ever a pharoah was guilty of'. Alauddin extended his domain to the length and breadth of India and assumed the title *Sikandar-i-Sani*—Alexander the Second. He was a conqueror as well as a builder. To him Delhi owes the Hauz-i-Alai, the artificial lake designed to supply water to Siri, a city built by him (beside which Feroz Tughlak later built a famous madrassa), the Alai Darwaza and Alai Minar near the Qutab. Khusrau would not be outdone by anyone in praising his ruler. While Alauddin Khilji had not even finished making the first (and as it turned out the only) storey of his Alai Minar which was to be double the height of the Qutab, Khusrau lavished these lines on it:

Shakle minara chu sutune ze sang
Az Pa-e saq-fe falak-e shisha rang
Saq-fe saman kaz kohnigi shud nigun
Dar tahe oo dashtah sangin-sutun

The minar is a pillar of stone; but it is as lustrous as glass
It supports the feeble, old, worn-out vault of heaven;
It was in fact designed to lend support to the sky.

Alauddin Khilji's son and successor, Qutubuddin Mubarak Shah, built the red sandstone Jamat Khana mosque close to Nizamuddin's tomb. Hence Amir Khusrau's lavish praise for him.

Qutubuddin Mubarak Shah became Sultan of Delhi in 1316. He found the duties of a sovereign somewhat irksome and preferred to while away his time drinking with his cronies or with the ladies of his harem. In his middle-age he developed a fondness for boys and wearing women's clothes. He became particularly attached to a young Hindu boy from Gujarat whom he converted to Islam and gave the name Khusru Khan. The goings on between the two men became the talk of Delhi's bazaars. Apparently at one of their orgies Khusru Khan murdered Mubarak Shah. Next morning he proclaimed himself King of Delhi with the title Sultan Nasiruddin.

The people of Delhi refused to recognize Nasiruddin and invited Ghazi Malik,

warden of the marches, to come to their rescue. Ghazi Malik proceeded to Delhi, captured Khusru Khan alias Nasiruddin and had him beheaded. He proclaimed himself Sultan Ghiasuddin Tughlak.

Amir Khusrau, as was his habit, was full of praise for the new Sultan who 'never did anything that was not replete with wisdom and sense'. Khusrau now led a retired life and spent most of his time in Hazrat Nizamuddin's hospice at Ghiaspur. But undoubtedly he saw another new city, Tughlakabad, go up a few kilometres south of the hospice. Ibn-i-Batuta describes the new city in the following words: 'Here were Tughlak's treasures and palaces, and the great palace he built of golden bricks, which when the sun rose, shone so dazzling that none could gaze upon it.' It was said that Ghiasuddin had a whole reservoir filled with molten gold. Khusrau's admiration for Ghiasuddin was not shared by the saintly Nizamuddin. He prophesied that Ghiasuddin's city, Tughlakabad, would soon become waste or be inhabited by *gujjars* who, besides being cattle-breeders, were also notorious robbers. The sultan was further angered by Nizamuddin's refusal to join the congregation at the royal mosque every Friday and ordered the hospice at Ghiaspur to be closed down. He swore to wreak vengeance on Nizamuddin when he returned to Delhi from a campaign. It was then that Nizamuddin uttered those ominous words: *Hunooz Dilli Door Ast*—it is a long way to Delhi. Ghiasuddin was never able to reach Delhi. While he was passing through a pavilion erected in his honour, the roof caved in and crushed his head. It was believed that the 'accident' had been contrived by his son, Mohammed bin Tughlak.

Despite his power and wealth Sultan Ghiasuddin had suffered from a gnawing sense of insecurity. Across Tughlakabad he built his own final resting place: an island fortress in the centre of an artificial lake connected to Tughlakabad by a narrow causeway. With the passage of years, the palaces, bazaars and mosques of Tughlakabad, as Nizamuddin had prophesied, became a wilderness. Only the mausoleum withstood the elements standing like an unconquered fortress in the midst of a flat plain, its white marble dome glistening above its grey sloping walls. Beside Ghiasuddin rest his wife and his son Mohammed bin Tughlak.

The Tughlaks introduced a new style of architecture to Delhi which was at once massive and austere like the Gothic in Europe. They used large slabs of stones without any ornamentation. They also introduced the sloping wall (taken from the mausoleum of Shah Rukn-i-Alam in Multan): these are the distinct feature of Ghiasuddin's tomb and remained in vogue for a couple of centuries thereafter.

In the year 1325 Delhi lost three famous sons: its patron-saint Nizamuddin, the Sultan who built Tughlakabad, and its beloved poet, Amir Khusrau. Ghiasuddin Tughlak was relegated to the pages of history books but the memory of Nizamuddin and Amir Khusrau have been kept fresh by the annual celebrations of their death anniversaries. Large crowds turn up from different parts of India and Pakistan to participate in these celebrations. Along Lodi Road go up stalls of sweetmeat vendors, sellers of bangles and other trinkets, miniature zoos, shooting galleries, ferris wheels and all else that goes with fun fairs. The celebrations usually include poetic symposia (*mushaira or kavi sammelan*) where leading poets read their new

compositions to the enthusiastic applause of *wah, wah* (well done) or *muqarrar* (encore). More popular than the symposia of poets are the *qawwali* programmes which begin late in the evenings and go on into the early hours of the mornings. The *qawwali* style of singing is an invention of Indian Muslim singers and has gained immense popularity amongst the masses. The accompaniments are usually harmoniums and tablas. What is unique about the *qawwali* is that it is sung by a party which may have as many as a dozen singers, and the rhythmic clapping of hands. The chorus increases in tempo. Some people lose control over themselves and begin to dance or go into a trance (*hal*). A good *quwwali* performance can be a memorable experience. And nowhere else in India or Pakistan can you hear as good *qawwalis* as you can at Nizamuddin.

Ibn-i-Batuta writing at the time of the reign of Ghiasuddin's son and successor Mohammed bin Tughlak recorded: 'The city of Delhi is made up now of four neighbouring and contiguous towns. One of them is Delhi proper, the old city built by the infidels and captured in the year 1192. The second is called Siri, known as the Abode of the Caliphate; this was the town given by the Sultan Ghiasuddin to the grandson of the Abbasid Caliph Mustansir, when he came to his court. The third is called Tughlakabad, after its founder, the Sultan Tughlak, the father of the Sultan of India to whose court we came. The fourth is called Jahanpanah, and is set apart for the residence of the reigning Sultan Mohammed bin Tughlak. He was the founder of it, and it was his intention to unite these four towns within a single wall, but after building part of it he gave up the rest because of the expense required for its construction.'

Let us now learn something about Mohammed bin Tughlak's attitude to Delhi.

Most people who lived in Delhi loved the city. There were others who preferred to live away from the atmosphere of status-conscious sycophancy that prevails round the seats of government. In its long, colourful history Delhi produced one man who both loved and hated Delhi with equal zest and eccentric intensity. This was Mohammed bin Tughlak who became Sultan in 1325. A year after his accession he took an insane dislike to Delhi. According to Ibn-i-Batuta, the Sultan was irked by abusive anonymous letters sent to him. 'So, he resolved to lay Delhi waste . . . a crier went forth proclaiming that no one should remain in Delhi after three days. As a result, most of the people went away but a few concealed themselves in their homes. The Sultan ordered a search for those who lingered. In a lane his slaves came upon two men, one a cripple and the other blind. The Sultan ordered the cripple to be blown up and the blind man to be dragged from Delhi to Daulatabad; only a leg of his reached Daulatabad . . . the city was reduced to a desert. In the night the Sultan mounted the roof of his palace and looked round Delhi and when neither the light of a lamp nor the smoke of a fire came into sight he remarked: "Now my heart is pleased and my soul is at peace."'

A year's residence in Daulatabad convinced the Sultan that he had made a grave mistake and ordered everyone to return to Delhi. He built himself another city close to Tughlakabad which he named Adilabad. Amongst its famous buildings was a palace of a thousand pillars (*Qash-i-hazaar sutoon*). He then raised an enormous wall

to encompass the earlier cities and called it Jahanpanah (refuge of the world). In commenting on the Sultan's character Ibn-i-Batuta records: 'The people never tired of rebelling nor the king of punishing them.' The Sultan boasted, 'I punish the most trifling act of contumacy with death. This I will do till I die or until the people act more honestly.' When the Sultan died in 1351, Barani, another historian, recorded 'the King was freed of his people and they from the King'.

Shahabuddin Abul Abbas Ahmed of Damascus who visited Delhi about this time records: 'Delhi consists of several cities which have become united, and each of which has given its name to all the rest. It is both long and broad, and covers a space of about sixty-four kilometres in circumference. The houses are built of stone and brick, and the roofs of wood. The floors are paved with a white stone, like marble. None of the houses is more than two storeys high, and some only one. It is only in the palace of the Sultan that marble is used for pavement. Delhi comprises an aggregate of twenty-one cities. Gardens extend on three sides of it, in a straight line of twelve thousand paces. The western side is not so furnished, because it borders on a mountain.' According to Abbas Ahmed, Delhi had a thousand colleges, seventy hospitals, two thousand homes for the poor, innumerable monasteries and public baths.

Tughlakabad, though crumbled, still breathes the splendour of its glorious past. Percy Brown, the famous author of books on Indian architecture, describes it as a 'wilderness of ruins, lifeless and desolate, all that remains of this great enterprise is a haunting scene of savage splendour'. You may wander amongst the acres of rubble and try to work out the city plan. The reservoir, mosques, the *meena* (ladies') bazaar and some of the palace buildings can easily be recognized. The rest is acre upon acre of stone and mortar, with vasicka bushes sprouting out of them. Apart from other visitors, all you may meet are a herd of rhesus monkeys and goats that scamper about. From the northern wall you look down upon a muddy pond in which there are more buffaloes than water, and the Gujjar village which has appropriated the name Tughlakabad for itself.

Mohammed bin Tughlak left no male heir to inherit his eccentricities and was succeeded by his cousin, Firoz, who was crowned Sultan at Delhi on 24 March, 1351.

When he became King, Feroz Shah Tughlak was a mature man in his forties and, although born of a Hindu mother, a devout Muslim. He also had a passion for building. In his Memoirs he wrote: 'Among the gifts which Allah bestowed upon me, His humble servant, was the desire to erect public buildings. So I built many mosques and colleges and monasteries.' He dug several canals, built hospitals and orphanages and had old buildings repaired. He added two storeys to Qutab Minar. He raised three cities, Fatehabad, Jaunpur and a new Delhi named after him, Firozabad or Kotla Firoze Shah, the magnificent ruins of which give character to the cricket stadium nearby. He brought the Asoka pillars to Delhi and planted one atop his palace. He was also a patron of men of learning: his most lasting contribution was the madrassa he built alongside Hauz Alai. It became the centre of Islamic learning. Rich people built their homes near the madrassa. Apparently the most

affluent amongst them were merchants from Khorasan who bought slaves, gold and silver, paper and books in Delhi and exported them to Afghanistan, Persia and Turkey.

Barani gave high praise to the madrassa. 'Its architectural proportions and pleasant air make it unique among the great buildings of the world,' he wrote. A poet, Mutahar of Kara, was more lyrical: 'Its dust was musk-scented, possessed the odour of amber. There was verdure everywhere and hyacinths, basils, roses and tulips were blooming.'

At one time the eminent philosopher-poet Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi was the head of the institution. That the student were well cared for is proved by Mutahar's description of a meal he had in the refectory. The menu included pheasants, partridges, herons, roasted fish and fowl. Pomegranate juice spiked with sorel was served as drink and betel leaves were offered in gold and silver dishes at the end of the meal.

Firoz Shah Tughlak's buildings reflect the impoverished state of the country. Instead of using stone, as his predecessors did, he used rubble and plaster. Of the few that have withstood the elements, we have three mosques, Begampuri, Khirki and Kali Masjid.

Firoz lived to be ninety. He died in the holy month of Ramadan in 1388 and was buried in the madrassa at Hauz Khas.

Firoz Shah Tughlak was a benign as well as an indulgent Sultan. He is said to have had [illegible],000 women of different nationalities in his harem and over 80,000 slaves to serve him. Soon after his death the Empire began to disintegrate. And a bare nine years later, in the reign of Nasiruddin Mohammed Tughlak, the Mongol, Taimur *Lang* (the lame one) invaded India with the manifest object of 'purifying the land from the filth of infidelity and polytheism'.

Taimur (Marlowe's 'scourge of God') was the most ruthless conqueror that ever came to India. Before engaging the Tughlak's army he ordered the cold-blooded massacre of 100,000 prisoners he had taken earlier. On 19 December 1398, he defeated the Tughlak army led by Mallu Khan Iqbal, and a day later encamped at the Hauz Khas madrassa. Taimur visited the monuments of Delhi and praised their beauty: 'They begin their works as giants and finish them like goldsmiths.' He paid homage to the tombs of Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki and Nizamuddin Auliya; the ladies of his harem visited the palace of a thousand pillars. Then he ordered Jahanpanah, Siri and Firozabad to be plundered. Over 50,000 inhabitants were slain and untold wealth in precious stones, gold and silver taken. The humblest of his footmen took over two dozen slaves. In fifteen days Taimur left nothing in Delhi except 'anarchy, pestilence and famine'.

The Tughlaks were replaced by the Saiyyads as the Sultans of Delhi. The first, Khizr Khan (1414–21) ruled in the name of Taimur. His son, Mubarak Shah (1421–34), spent his years putting down rebellions. He left his name in yet another township, Kotla Mubarakpur, now swallowed up by New Delhi's Defence Colony and South Extension. Mubarak Shah was murdered in 1434. Two other Saiyyads had a brief and uneasy tenancy as rulers of Delhi for three years. The second,

bearing the name of misfortune, Alam Shah, had his domain restricted to the area between Delhi and Palam. By then an Afghan chieftain, Malik Bahlol Lodi had, as a historian records, 'the lust for a kingdom settled in his brain'. He captured Delhi and on 19 April 1451 had himself crowned as Sultan Bahlol Shah.

Bahlol was an able, pious and fair-minded Sultan. As was customary among Afghans, he treated his nobles as equals; instead of sitting on a throne he sat on a carpet and had them sit beside him. If he had any misunderstanding with a noble, he would go to him, place his sword at the other's feet and crave forgiveness. When he died he was buried in an unpretentious tomb in the courtyard of the tomb of Hazrat Roshan Chiragh, the disciple and successor of Hazrat Nizamuddin as head of the Chishtiya order of Sufis.

Bahlol had ten sons, of which the fifth became Sultan. He did not care for Delhi and built himself a new city, Sikandra, on the northern suburb of Agra. (The Emperor Akbar later chose it as his final resting place.) On his death, his son Ibrahim interned his father's body in a fortress-like mausoleum he built in Delhi. Ibrahim did not have the qualities of his sire or grandsire and fell out with the Afghan chieftains who had sustained the Lodi Sultanate. India was ready for another change of dynasty.

In his *Memoirs* the Mughal Zahiruddin Babur wrote that 'he had never ceased to think of the conquest of Hindustan' because 'possession of the country by the Turks had come down from old . . . our eye is on this land and on this people'.

After several unfruitful forays into Hindustan, Babur undertook his final and victorious expedition in 1526. 'When the sun was in the sagittarius, putting my foot in the stirrup of resolution, and taking in my hands the reins of faith, I marched out against Sultan Ibrahim, son of Sultan Sikandar, son of Sultan Bahlol Lodi Afghan, in whose possession the city of Delhi and Kingdom of Hindustan at that time were.'

On 21 April 1526 the Mughals and Afghans clashed at Panipat. The Afghans were defeated; Ibrahim Lodi was killed and buried on the battlefield. The Empire of Hindustan passed into the hands of the Mughals.

The Lodis have left several beautiful mosques and mausoleums scattered over New Delhi. Some of them can be seen in the sylvan setting of Lodi Park. Others are to be found in Nizamuddin, Hauz Khas and (Moth ki Masjid) in South Extension.

Shahjahanabad of the Mughals

No one calls it Shahjahanabad any more. It is known either as Old Delhi or the walled city. But in historical fact it is Shahjahanabad, the city built by Shah Jahan (1627-57), the fifth in the line of Mughal Emperors: Babur, Humayun, Akbar and Jehangir.

The first Mughal (from Mongol; they were in fact Turks) to invade India was Changez Khan, but he was beaten back in the plains of the Punjab. It was his succeşsor Taimur *Lang* (the lame one) who in 1398 made a bloody invasion into the heart of the country. Over a hundred years later, his descendant, Babur, claimed India as his inheritance and, having conquered it, decided to remain there. That was strange because he did not like anything about India or the Indians. In his *Memoirs* he

wrote: 'The people are not handsome. They have no idea of the charms of friendly society, of frankly mixing together or of familiar intercourse. They have no genius, no comprehension of mind, no politeness of manner, no kindness or fellow-feeling, no ingenuity or mechanical invention in planning or executing their handicraft works, no skill or knowledge in design or architecture; they have no horses, no good flesh, no grapes or musk-melon, no good fruits, no ice or cold water, no good fruit or bread in their bazaars, no baths or colleges, no candles, no torches, not a candlestick.'

Despite his aversion to everything Indian, Babur decided to stay in India and only provided that after his death his body be interned in his beloved Kabul. According to legend (historically untenable), he willed himself to die. His elder son and heir apparent, Humayun was taken very ill. In her *Memoirs*, his daughter Gulbadan Begum writes that Babur went round his son's bed three times, repeating: 'O God! if a life be exchanged for a life, I who am Babur give my life and my being for Humayun. . . . I have borne it away.' And so it happened. On 26 December 1530 Babur who was only 48 years old and in good health died and Humayun who was very sick was restored to health. Babur was temporarily buried in a Mughal-style garden he had laid in Agra (known as Aramgah, the place of repose). Nine years later his remains were taken to Kabul. Humayun was proclaimed Emperor of India on [illegible] December 1530.

Humayun has been described by the eminent historian T. G. P. Spear as the 'problem child of the Mughals'. He was an easy-going aesthete who loved books, opium and the flask of wine more than the arduous duties of a sovereign. Despite his learning (he could read and write Turkish, Persian, Arabic and Hindi and was keenly interested in mathematics, philosophy and astronomy), he was inordinately superstitious and given to consulting astrologers at every move.

Humayun decided to build himself a new Delhi. He chose the site of ancient Indraprastha on the western bank of the Yamuna, laid the foundation stone in 1533 and named the new city Deen Panah (haven of faith). He was not destined to live there too long. He had to contend with his brothers, and while he was engaged in fraternal strife, an energetic Afghan chieftain Sher Shah Suri, who had established himself in Bengal and Bihar, marched across the Gangetic plains and inflicted a humiliating defeat on the Mughal army. Humayun barely escaped with his life by swimming across the swollen waters of the Ganga near Chausa on an inflated skin. (He is said to have rewarded his rescuer by making him king of Delhi for a day and having leather coins struck for the occasion.)

Sher Shah Suri deserves a chapter to himself in any book of Indian history. He was one of the eight sons of Hasan Shah who had a small holding of land in Sasaram in Bihar. He was first named Farid, but after he slew a tiger single-handed he was given the name Sher Shah by his patron, Bahar Khan, who also appointed him governor of South Bihar. Later Sher Khan served under Babur, and on Babur's death established himself as ruler of Bihar and Bengal. Although he now became Sher Shah he preferred to be known amongst his Afghan supporters as *Hazrat-i-ala*, the first amongst equals. It was after he had defeated and compelled Humayun to

leave India that he was crowned Emperor of Hindustan. His empire extended from the eastern-most boundary of Assam to the north-western frontier of the Punjab.

Sher Shah Suri (described by Sir Wolseley Haig as 'the greatest of the Muslim rulers of India') is best remembered for putting the administration and the revenue system of India on a firm basis. In this he was helped by his Hindu minister, Todar Mal. He is equally famous as a road-builder. The Grand Trunk road (the Indian portion now named after him as Sher Shah Suri Marg) ran from Dacca through Bihar, Uttar Pradesh to Delhi and Agra right up to the river Indus. Other roads connected Agra to Mandu, Agra to Jodhpur and Chittor and Lahore to Multan. In Delhi all that we can see of Humayun's contribution to the Purana Qila (Old Fort) today are its lofty walls and its imposing gates with the Star of David emblems; within it, the octagonal two-storeyed tower (Sher Mandal) and the red sandstone (Qila-i-Kuhna) mosque were the handiwork of Sher Shah. But as he put it himself, he had gained sovereignty of Hindustan at the time of the evening prayer. After a rule of seven brief years he was killed in an explosion at the seige of Kalinjar on 22 May 1545.

Sher Shah was succeeded by his son, Islam Shah (1545-53) and was supported by his father's general, Issa Khan (his mosque and mausoleum are close to Humayun's tomb). Islam Shah was succeeded by his twelve-year old son, Firoze, who was murdered three days after his accession by his uncle, who crowned himself as Mohammed Adil Shah (1553-7). The kingdom split up. The real power in Delhi passed into the hands of an upstart but brave and able bania salt merchant of Riwari known as Hemu. Humayun realized that it was an opportune time to return and reclaim his father's kingdom.

In 1556, Humayun, now father of the 11-year old Akbar, returned to India and defeated the Delhi army led by Hemu at Panipat on 5 November 1556. Akbar was persuaded by his tutor, Bairam Khan, to flesh his sword on the body of Hemu. Humayun took residence in the palace built by Sher Shah in Deen Panah. He resumed his hobbies and idled away the hours with his astrological charts and books now housed in Sher Mandal. On the evening of 24 January 1557 he was in the Sher Mandal library discussing the state of affairs in Mecca with some Hajis who had just returned from pilgrimage when he heard the call for prayer from the mosque below. He was also anxious to see Venus appear in the sky. As he was hurrying down the stairs (our ancestors made the most tortuous stairs) he missed his step, fell headlong and fractured his skull. He died three days later. His senior Queen, Hamida Bano Begum raised a handsome mausoleum for him. It was designed by an Iranian, Mirak Mirza Ghias, in Persian style and took nine years (1565-73) to build. It is regarded as a rare masterpiece:

Har ke meen khwahad ke binad shakl-i-Firdaus-i-Bareen
Go beva een Qasr-o-een baghe Humayun ra be-been

If one wishes to have a glimpse of Heaven on earth
One should visit the tomb and garden of Emperor Humayun.

It was destined to be the resting place of many Mughal princes to come.

Humayun's tomb and the mausoleums around it are well worth a visit. Near the entrance on the west side are the remains of a garden pavilion ascribed to a lady, Bu Halima. Facing it on the south side is the mosque and tomb of Issa Khan, Sher Shah Suri's general. It is noteworthy that while Issa Khan's tomb and mosque, which is only a couple of decades older, has the austere strength of the style used by the Saiyyads, Humayun's mausoleum is more delicate in outline and marks the beginning of Persian influence on Indian architecture. Humayun's tomb is said to be the model on which the famous Taj Mahal of Agra was based. For the first time we have the double-dome introduced in India. Humayun's dome sits somewhat squatly on the main building; the Taj's dome was given a 'neck' to give it more elevation. Besides that the predominance of red sandstone deprives Humayun's tomb of the pearly lustre that white marble gives to the Taj. The Taj also scores by the use of minarets which frame it.

Humayun's mausoleum is a vast graveyard. There are several tombs on the same level as the Emperor's own and hundreds of others in the catacombs below. Since the custom of engraving names on tombstones was not prevalent, it is impossible to tell whom they belong to. It is likely that amongst those buried there are Dara Shikoh (the eldest son of Shah Jahan who was executed by his brother Aurangzeb), and the three Mughal princes shot by Captain Hodson in 1857.

Humayun's son, Akbar (1556-1605), did not fancy Delhi and preferred to live in Agra or in nearby Fatehpur Sikri. However, two important monuments were raised in Delhi during his reign. His foster-mother, Maham Anaga (nurse), built in 1561 an impressive complex consisting of a mosque and madrassa, Khair-ul-manzil (the most auspicious of houses) facing the western gate of the Purana Qila. Forty days after the execution of her son, Adham Khan (1562) Maham Anaga died of grief. Akbar raised the Lodi style mausoleum near the Qutab Minar in Mehrauli in which the mother and son were buried.

Akbar's son Jehangir (1605-27) also did not care much about living in Delhi. When away from Agra he preferred being in Kashmir or the Punjab. Both Jehangir and his wife, Nur Jahan, were buried in Lahore. Delhi had to await the accession of Jehangir's son, Shah Jahan (1627-57) to come into its full glory.

Shah Jahan was undoubtedly the greatest builder of all times. He was born at Lahore on 5 January 1592 and named Khurram (the joyous) by his grandsire, the Emperor Akbar. Right from childhood he was interested in buildings and attracted his father's attention in the way he had designed his living quarters in Kabul. Soon after he ascended the throne in 1627 he set about enlarging the fort in Agra, built more palaces and the Moti (Pearl) Mosque. On the death of his favourite wife, Arjamand Bano Begum, known to the world as Mumtaz Mahal (eminence of the palace) who had borne him fourteen children in as many years, he built her mausoleum, the most beautiful of all buildings in the world, the Taj Mahal. After beautifying Agra he decided in 1639 to make Delhi his capital and turned his creative genius to building a new city. For his own residence he chose the right bank of the river Yamuna, close to the Salimgarh fortress built by Sher Shah Suri's son, Islam Shah. Round the palace he built the Red Fort, designed very much like the one in Agra but

twice as large (1000 yards long, 500 yards broad with walls 52 feet high). The fort was designed by Ustad Ahmed Lahori and executed by two master-masons Ustad Hamid and Ustad Hira (the lanes where they lived still bear their names). Facing the southern gate of the fort was a mound called Bhojla Pahar (hill). On this elevation Shah Jahan built the great royal mosque—one of the biggest and amongst the most beautiful that can be seen in the Islamic world. It was initially named *Masjid-i-Jahan Nama* (mosque with a view of the world) but later simply as the Jama (Friday) Mosque. The fort and palaces took nine years to build; the mosque another six (1650–6). The city went up around the fort. And around the city a grey-stone wall with many bastions and fourteen gates.

Shah Jahan's wives and daughters made their contributions to the city. His daughter, Princess Jahanara Begum, laid Urdu Bazaar near the Jama Masjid and the main bazaar leading from the western gate of the fort and ending at the mosque built by one of Shah Jahan's wives, Begum Fatehpuri in 1650. A canal (Ali Mardan's) flanked by trees on either side, ran in the centre of this bazaar, widening into a tank in the middle. On moonlit nights the canal and the pool were resplendent with reflected lunar glory; so the bazaar came to be known as Chandni Chowk—the moonlit square. Two other wives of Shah Jahan built mosques: Begum Akbarabadi one in Faiz Bazaar (Daryaganj) and Sirhindi Begum who, besides building a mosque at Lahori Darwaza, also laid a garden near Sabzi Mandi.

Shah Jahan's daughters, Jahanara Begum and Roshanara Begum, built their tombs in their lifetimes. Jahanara chose to be buried close to Hazrat Nizamuddin. She composed her own epitaph:

Baghair sabza na poshad kase mazar mara
Hi qabra posh ghariban hamin gaya has ast

Let only the humble grass grow upon my grave
Grass is the best covering for the poor.

Princess Roshanara laid out a garden with the pavilion for her grave twenty years before she died in 1671. The Roshanara Garden still has a large number of trees of great antiquity.

The glory of Shahjahanabad has to be read in tales of travellers to be believed, because little of it remains to substantiate the claim inscribed in (now somewhat faded) letters of gold in the Diwan-i-Khas:

Gar Firdaus bar roo-e-zameen ast
Hameenast-o-hameenast-o-hameenast

If on earth there is a place of bliss
It is this, it is this, it is this.

The Fort, first known as *Urdu-i-Maulla* and later the *Qila-i-Maulla*—the exalted fort—reached the zenith of its glory in the lifetime of its builder. It was said:

Kase ra zindgani shad bashad
Ki dar Shah-e-jahanabad bashad

The man who fortunately finds residence in
Shahjahanabad leads a happy life.

Foreign ambassadors and state dignitaries rode through the high-vaulted Meena Bazaar and dismounted at the Nakkar Khana, to be welcomed by a roll of drums and music. They handed in their weapons; had their names announced and were escorted through red curtains (the prerogative of royalty) towards the Diwan-i-Am (hall of general audience). As they approached the royal presence they performed deep salaams (*kornish*). They received robes of honour, made their *nazarana* (offering of gold coins) and took the places appointed for them. The more important visitors were invited to converse with the Emperor, or asked to a second and less formal meeting in the Diwan-i-Khas (hall of special audience). Here they would stand closer to the Emperor seated on the Peacock Throne and perhaps catch a glimpse of the diamond Koh-i-noor (mountain of light) which he sported on his arm.

Court records give us a fairly accurate picture of life in the Red Fort. Sir Thomas Roe, England's Ambassador in the Mughal court, observed that the daily routine of the Emperor was 'as regular as the clock that strikes at set hours'. As the morning star appeared in the sky, the royal orchestra began to play music appropriate for the morning hours. From the minarets of mosques muezzins called the faithful to prayer. The citizens assembled on the banks of the river Yamuna below the palace walls. As the sun came up the Emperor appeared on the Jasmine tower for the *Jhuroka-i-Darshan,* so that his subjects could see for themselves that he was in good health. If His Majesty had had a late night, he would retire for another couple of hours; otherwise he would say his prayers, tell the beads of his rosary and have breakfast. By mid-morning he was ready to commence business of state at the Diwan-i-Am. Princes, ministers and courtiers stood at places appropriate to their rank. Mace-bearers led the royal procession announcing the arrival of the Emperor in sonorous words: '*Ba adab, Ba Mulahizah, Hoshiar!* His Royal Majesty Abul Muzaffar Shahabuddin Mohammad, Sahib-i-Qiran Sani, Shadow of God on Earth, Monarch of the Universe, Emperor of Hindustan, makes his august presence!'

As the Emperor appeared on the balcony, the assemblage made three deep bows touching their foreheads with their right hands. The Emperor took his seat on the throne. Ladies of the royal seraglio watched through the trellised windows. Reports sent from distant parts of the Empire were read aloud. Appointments, transfers of postings were announced; visiting dignitaries wearing robes of honour presented to them were allowed to make their offerings in gold mohars or precious stones, horses or elephants. On certain days criminals were brought in chains, their cases heard and sentences pronounced. Executioners wearing quilted caps and armed with hatchets and whips were always present to carry out sentences on the spot. And all the while bands played; jugglers, wrestlers, acrobats and nautch girls performed; lions, tigers, elephants, rhinocerus and other animals were paraded. The session lasted for about two hours and came to an end as the Emperor pronounced *takhlia*, and a red curtain dropped in front of the balcony.

The court, now consisting only of princes, ministers and ambassadors reassembled in the Diwan-i-Khas to conduct more serious business of state. So passed another hour—followed by a third session in Shah Burj, where only princes of royal blood and the seniormost ministers specially invited had further audience with the Emperor. By then it was well past noon. The Emperor retired to his harem for his mid-day repast. This was invariably taken sitting cross-legged on the carpet. The Portuguese, Sebastian Manrique, who claims to have smuggled himself into the harem when Shah Jahan was being entertained by his father-in-law, writes that the banquet lasted four hours with over fifty separate courses of delicacies served in silver and gold dishes with elaborate ceremony. The plates were brought in by eunuchs, handed over to the ladies-in-waiting, who then went down on their knees to hold them before the guests. And all the while there was music and dancing and recitation of verses in praise of the Emperor.

After the mid-day repast the Emperor took a brief siesta. He spent much of the afternoon with the ladies of the seraglio and dealt with matters concerning his vast family. He settled allowances, pensions and sums to be given in charity to provide dowries for girls of poor families. In these matters favourite queens, concubines and princesses played a very important role.

The royal seraglio was often very large and its inmates had problems of their own. Most of them were well-provided and had properties and businesses they managed themselves. The Princesses Jahanara and Roshanara had large fortunes in gold, jewellery and real estate. Most princesses were educated, some wrote poetry. But the rigours of having to live in an all-female establishment guarded by armies of eunuchs perhaps warped their character. The Italian Niccolo Manucci, who had an ear for gossip and a very fertile imagination claims to have gained access to the harem posing as a doctor. He writes that the ladies of the seraglio often feigned sickness in order to get a chance to talk to the doctor and have a man feel their pulse. He had to stretch his hand inside the curtain and instead of it being directed to the pulse it was sometimes placed on the breast. If Manucci is to be believed, groceries from the bazaar meant for the harem kitchen were first inspected by eunuchs and 'radishes, cucumbers or similar vegetables' that he blushed to name were not allowed in. This is reinforced by Tom Coryat who likewise observed that 'whatever is brought in of virill shape, for instance, raddishes, so great is the jealousie, and so frequent the wickedness of this people, that they are cut and jagged for fear of converting the same to some unnatural abuse.'

In the afternoon the Emperor again appeared for *Jhuroka-i-Darshan*. Sometimes he witnessed elephant fights (the sole prerogative of the Emperor) or took the salute at a march past of his troops. After evening prayers, he again went into the harem, dined with members of his family and then retired to his bed chamber accompanied by ladies chosen for the honour.

In the summer of 1657 Shah Jahan was taken ill in Delhi. As soon as the news leaked out his four sons, Dara Shikoh, Shuja, Aurangzeb and Murad, began to plot against each other to gain the throne. The eldest, Dara Shikoh, who was the Emperor's favourite, accompanied his father to Agra and sent out armies against his

brothers. Shuja was defeated and fled to Burma where he was assassinated. Aurangzeb, who had joined hands with Murad defeated Dara Shikoh, made his father prisoner and then arrested Murad by trick and had him murdered. On 31 July 1658 he proclaimed himself Emperor of Hindustan in the Shalimar Garden near Badli Serai on the Grand Trunk Road. He had a second coronation in Delhi in June 1659 after he had got his brothers out of his way. Dara Shikoh and his son were captured, executed and buried in Humayun's mausoleum.

The Shalimar Garden has little left to justify its name. It was laid during the time of Emperor Shah Jahan and named the Aizabad garden after a lady of his harem, Aizunnissa Begum. It was used as a country house by Aurangzeb. David Ochterlony, English Resident at the Mughal court, kept his Indian seraglio here. The main building, Shish Mahal, still has some faded murals on its walls.

'Kingship knows no kinship' said Aurangzeb. He lived to prove the adage by the way he shed the blood of his kinsmen. He was a pious bigot and tried to impose his views and faith on everyone. His non-Muslim subjects, the Marathas, Rajputs, Jats and the Sikhs, rose against him. He spent the later years of his life putting down one rebellion after the other. In 1675, the Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur was brought to Delhi and beheaded in the Kotwali (police station) in Chandni Chowk. (A big temple, Sisganj, marks the site of the execution.) Before Aurangzeb died in 1707 at the age of ninety he realized that the days of the Mughal dynasty were numbered. *'Az na hama fasad baqi'* ('after me there will be chaos') he said.

A few buildings were added to the Red Fort after Shah Jahan. Aurangzeb built the exquisitely beautiful white marble mosque (Moti Masjid) near the Diwan-i-Khas. Later Mughals built the monsoon pavilions and a miniature island palace in between. A few years after Aurangzeb's death, his daughter, Zinat-un-Nissa Begum, built a large and beautiful mosque in Daryaganj along the city fortifications. It came to be known after her as Zinat Masjid. There are not many worshippers there today but it has a very popular school in the premises.

The Mughal dynasty produced as many as nineteen kings, but only the first six—Babur, Humayun, Akbar, Jehangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb—who ruled from 1526 to 1707 are referred to in books of history as the Great Mughals. The remaining thirteen had brief tenures (some of only a few days) over a rapidly shrinking empire and were often at the mercy of the Marathas, Rohillas, Sikhs, Jats, Afghans, Persians and, ultimately, of the English. At the zenith of their power their Empire extended from Kashmir in the north to Cape Comorin, and from Afghanistan to Assam. The main source of income was land revenue, usually assessed at one-third or one-quarter of the gross produce. Custom duties, poll tax and monopoly over the production of certain items like salt accounted for the rest. Spoils of war brought in gold, silver and precious stones along with elephants and horses. It is difficult to make any accurate estimate of the wealth of the Mughal Emperors, but from the quantity and quality of the precious stones with which some of them and the ladies of their harems adorned themselves, it can be assumed that it was fabulous and beyond reckoning.

The decline and fall of the Mughal dynasty and the fading of the glory of

Delhi makes tragic reading. After Aurangzeb's death his sons, following the traditions of their forefathers, fought each other. Bahadur Shah won the fratricidal contest but had to spend his five years (1707-12) fighting the Sikhs led by Banda Bahadur. He was followed by Jahandar Shah, who after a few months, was murdered and replaced by Farrukhsiyar (1713-18). Farrukhsiyar succeeded in capturing Banda Bahadur and his family and had the entire band of several hundred Sikhs executed in Mehrauli. In 1718 Farrukhsiyar was assassinated in the Nakkar Khana of the Red Fort. Then came Mohammed Shah—aptly named *Rangeela*, the colourful one. He was an aesthete, a patron of music and the arts. He also spent most of his time drinking and making merry. However, it was during his reign and at his request that Maharaja Jai Singh II of Jaipur (1699–1793) built the observatory, Jantar Mantar (the nearest English equivalent would be the abra-cadabra of magic). This has sundial on a triangular elevation and several other intriguing constructions still used to calculate eclipses of the Sun and the moon and the movements of stars. The entrance of Jantar Mantar is on Parliament Street between Parliament House and Connaught Circus.

Once more the sluice gates in the north-western passes opened and hordes of Persians led by Nadir Shah invaded India. On 11 February 1739 the Mughal army which tried to block the Persians at Karnal was ignominiously defeated. A fortnight later the Persians, having looted towns that fell on their way, entered Delhi on 8 March 1739. They were welcomed with feasting and the display of fireworks. Nadir Shah reciprocated by demanding heavy indemnity for the trouble he had been put to in having had to come to Delhi. Saturday, 10 March 1739 was the festival of Id-ul-zuha commemorating Abraham's proferred sacrifice of his son. The Persians went into the city demanding wheat and mutton to celebrate the occasion. The citizens refused to comply. Riots broke out in which many Persian soldiers were killed. The next morning, Sunday, 11 March 1739, Nadir Shah rode through Chandni Chowk to Roshanaddaulah's Sunehri Mosque, drew his sword and proclaimed that till he put it back into its scabbard, the life of every citizen of Delhi was forfeit. For the next six hours the Persians slew every man, woman or child they could find. Ultimately, Mohammed Shah begged Nadir Shah to desist. 'If you want to continue the killing,' he pleaded, 'then put life back into those you have destroyed for none now remain.' It is variously estimated that between 20,000 to 150,000 inhabitants of Delhi were put to the sword on that fateful Sunday afternoon.

What remained of Delhi after the Persian visitation is best described by the poet Mirza Mohammed Rafi Sauda (1713-81) who was living in the city: 'How can I describe the desolation of Delhi? There is no house from where the jackal's cry cannot be heard. The mosques at evening are unlit and deserted, and only in one house in a hundred will you see a light burning . . . vermin crawl in the places where in former days men welcomed the coming of spring with music and rejoicing. The lovely buildings which once made the famished man forget his hunger are in ruins now. In the once-beautiful gardens where the nightingale sang his love songs to the rose the grass grows waist-high around the fallen pillars and ruined arches. Shah-jahanabad, you never deserved this terrible fate! You who were once vibrant with

life and love and hope, like the heart of a young lover, you for whom men afloat upon the ocean of the world once set their course as to the promised shore, you from whose dust men came to gather pearls. Not even a lamp of clay now burns where once the chandelier blazed with light.'

The enormous loot that Nadir Shah took from Delhi included the Peacock Throne and the Koh-i-noor diamond. A few years after Nadir Shah came a series of invasions led by Nadir's Afghan general, Ahmed Shah Abdali. Like Nadir, he looted the city and even took out precious stones embedded in the walls of the palaces. Another poet, Mir Taqi Mir, who once asked:

> The seven climes are in its every lane
> Does Delhi have its equal anywhere?

describes Delhi after the Afghan visitation: 'The scene of desolation filled my eyes with tears. . . . I could not recognize the houses and often lost my bearings. Of the former inhabitants there was no trace, and no matter whom I inquired about, I was told that he was not there and nobody knew where he might be found. The houses were in ruins. Walls had collapsed. Cloisters and wineshops alike were deserted. Whole bazaars had vanished. The children playing in the streets, the comely young men, the austere elders—all had gone. . . . Everywhere was a terrible emptiness. . . . All at once I found myself in the quarter where I had once lived. I recalled the life I used to live, foregathering with my friends in the evenings, reciting poetry, and living the life of a lover—weeping at nights for the love of beautiful women, writing verse to them. . . . I came away from the lane and stood on the deserted road, gazing in stunned silence at the scene of desolation, and filled with abhorrence at what I saw. And there and then I made a vow that as long as I lived, I would never come this way again.'

> Once through this ruined city did I pass
> I espied a lonely bird on a bough and asked:
> 'What knowest thou of this wilderness?'
> It replied: 'I can sum it up in two words, Alas! alas!'

Mir never lost his love for Delhi. Poverty forced him to search for a patron in Lucknow. In the first poetical symposium in which he took part, some poets mocked at his tattered clothes and wanted to know where he came from. Mir's reply in verse was a passionate tribute to his beloved city:

> You men of eastern regions
> Knowing my beggarly state you mock me,
> You snigger amongst yourselves and ask me
> 'Where on earth can you have come from?'
> Let me tell you:
> There was once a fair city
> Amongst the cities of the world the first in fame
> It hath been ruined and laid desolate
> To that city I belong, Delhi is its name.

In the years of chaos Delhi had two new monuments added to it. The tomb of Mirza Muqim Abul Mansur Khan, entitled Safdar Jang, who was viceroy of Oudh and later the chief minister of Ahmed Shah (1748-54) was built by his son Shujaud-daulah in 1754. He took the marble and stone from Khan-i-Khana's tomb near Nizamuddin to raise an imitation of the mausoleum of Humayun. Connoisseurs of architecture decry its proportions and over-ornamentation. It has been described as 'the last flicker in the lamp of Mughal architecture in Delhi'. Across Safdar Jang's tomb came the tombs of Mirza Najaf Khan and his daughter, Fatima. Najaf Khan who died in 1782 was the last of the generals to keep marauders at bay. All that remains of this valiant soldier's tomb is a large red sandstone platform over a vault surrounded by a lawn.

After the Persians and the Afghans came the Marathas, Jats, Sikhs and Rohillas, each in turn taking from Delhi whatever remained. Mir summed it up in verse:

> Thieves and robbers, Sikhs, Marathas
> Kings and beggars, all desire;
> Only those have peace who've nought,
> Penury alone is riches here.

In August 1803 the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam asked the British for help. On 11 September 1803, the British army led by Lord Lake defeated the Marathas in a battle fought on the left bank of the Yamuna facing Humayun's tomb. They took Delhi under protection and settled a pension for Shah Alam. For half a century Delhi had peace. Europeans (mainly English) became a part of Delhi's aristocracy. Most of them lived in Daryaganj or in Kashmiri Gate. Some big European-style mansions were built during this time. Metcalfe House, the Residency (now office of the University of Delhi), Dilkusha near the Qutab and Ludlow Castle were some of them. James Skinner built St James's Church and, opposite his own residence (later Hindu College), a mosque for his Muslim wife.

On the death of Akbar Shah II in 1837, his eldest son succeeded to the throne with the title of Bahadur Shah II. He was better known by his pseudonym 'Zafar' because he was an uncommonly talented poet. At the time of his accession, Bahadur was a sixty-two year old grandfather of many children. Three years later he married a sixteen-year old beauty, Zeenat Mahal, and sired a son through her.

Bahadur Shah was content to live as a pensioner of the British. His chief preoccupations were hunting, rearing doves and writing poetry. He had an enormous appetite and an uncontrollable passion for mangoes. At the time there were several eminent poets living in Delhi. There were Shaikh Ibrahim Zauq (1789-1854) who instructed Zafar in the art of writing poetry, Nawab Mirza Khan Dagh (1831-1905) and Asadullah Khan Ghalib (1797-1869) who later came to be recognized as the greatest poet of the Urdu language. Occasionally poetic symposia were arranged in the Red Fort where these poets, including some English and French officers, recited their works.

Shaikh Ibrahim Zauq, the son of a common soldier who became the poet laureate of the Mughal court, started with a salary of Rs 4 per month and ended with no

more than Rs 100. But so attached was he to Delhi that when he received an offer of a higher salary from a Raja of Hyderabad he declined politely:

Though love of poetry be at its height
In the Hyderabad of today
How can I tear myself from these lanes?
How can I leave Delhi and go away?

There was always a note of sadness in most of Zafar's compositions. Here is an example from one of his oft-quoted poems:

In love it's not the loss of peace
Or patience that I mourn.
Love's sorrow has become my friend
When other friends I have forsworn,

'Tis a thousand wonders that even now
The cup-bearer brings not jug and wine,
Knowing the days of pleasure, the rounds of mirth
Not forever last upon this earth.

Of myself nothing did I know
But others' good and bad I knew
Then fell my eye upon my evil deeds
Remained none so evil in my view.

With the dazzling glory of the Sun
Today, after many days, she came.
All calm and patience did I lose
Not all her shyness did her restrain.

O Zafar! know him not as a man
However clever, wise, benign
Who in pleasures' pursuit forgets his God
In anger's passion, wrath divine.

The languorous days came to an abrupt end on 11 May 1857, when Indian sepoys serving in the East India Company's regiments in Meerut rose in rebellion against their British masters. They marched to Delhi, proclaimed the eighty-two year old Bahadur Shah as the real Emperor of India and declared *Jihad*—holy war—against the English, *feringhee*. It ended in disaster. By the monsoon the English, aided by the Punjabis, were encamped on the ridge beyond Kashmiri Gate. They blew up the city wall and stormed into the city. Bahadur Shah fled with his family to Humayun's tomb.

The English wreaked terrible vengeance on Delhi. They blew up several bazaars between the Red Fort and the royal mosque. Two sons and a grandson of Bahadur Shah were shot in cold blood near Sher Shah Suri's Lal Darwaza which thereafter came to be named *Khooni* (bloody) gate. Bahadur Shah, his wife and son were banished to Rangoon. For many months after the suppression of the revolt, the

favourite after-dinner pastime of British officers was to watch Indians being hanged in Chandni Chowk. They sat in their arm chairs, smoking cigars and sipping cognac and took bets on which of the batch on the gallows would be the last to die. Their contribution to the Red Fort were three-storeyed army barracks—the most hideous structures that can be seen in Delhi.

Shahjahanabad, which was designed to house a population of 60,000, had because of its prosperity, in reign of Aurangzeb accommodated 200,000. By the time the British finished wreaking vengeance the city was left with the population it was designed for—60,000. The poet Nawab Mirza Khan Dagh who had gone to Hyderabad wrote an elegy on the fate of the city whose name had become a suffix to his poetic synonym, Dagh Dehlavi:

> Now the heavens mourn over the earth's fate
> Empty homes cry out for those who lived there before
> Beggars and the rich, old and young, all are in tears
> A world cries for the Delhi that is no more

He ended his elegy with a prayer:

> Lord! again inhabited and prosperous, let us see it
> Lord! as the fulfilment of our desires, let us see it.

Even though there are still marvellous things to be seen in it, the visitor today will nevertheless have to use a lot of imagination to recreate the picture of the exalted fort in the days gone by. Meena Bazaar is today an arcade of shops selling brass-ware, gaudy scarfs, recently manufactured 'antiques' and miniature Taj Mahals in glass cases. No sooner he steps in he will be accosted by shopkeepers' agents: 'Yes Sir, some *marbil varbil*?' The Diwan-i-Khas is often used to honour visiting dignitaries. Of the Hayat Baksh (life-giving) gardens nothing remains except dry water-ways, dead fountains, scraggy lawns and dust-laden bushes. For the last many years craftsmen have been employed to put back stones in sockets from which they were gouged. Every evening a *Son et Lumiere* programme tells you in Hindi and English all that happened in the Red Fort: the first part tells of its glory, the rest of its despoliation.

Bahadur Shah Zafar would not recognize the Delhi he left in 1857. Ali Mardan's tree-lined canal disappeared a few years after he left. The coffee houses that abounded in Chandni Chowk are gone, as also its peace. The once broad street is congested with traffic. Roshanaddaulah's mosque from where Nadir Shah ordered the massacre of citizens is still there but facing it is now the big Sikh temple, Sisganj, where Guru Tegh Bahadur was executed. There are still some sweet-meat shops claiming descent from caterers to the royal court (*Ghantewala shahi halwai*), but with the disappearance of royal patronage the craftsmen in silver, gold and ivory have taken to catering to the tastes of *nouveau riche*. The street on which a coparisoned elephant was a common sight is today a jangle of cycles, pedicabs, scooters and milling crowds.

The Jama Masjid stands towering above the city as it always did. But many

bazaars that surrounded it have changed beyond recognition. Until recently the steps of the mosque were cluttered with junk shops (*Gudri Bazaar*) where you could buy back the hub-wheel of your car stolen a day earlier, as well as a rare manuscript. The northern wall of Shahjahanabad extending from the bastion overlooking the Yamuna (now separated by Delhi's *boulevard extérieur*, the Ring Road) to the westernmost bastion still bear imprints of the heavy bombardment to which the English subjected the city in 1857. The English also raised a few nondescript monuments to commemorate the event. The site of a powder magazine which a handful of intrepid English soldiers blew up with themselves on it to prevent it falling in the hands of the rebels is recalled by a catacomb-like building which is now a traffic island in Kashmiri Gate. A bullet-riddled cross mounted on a large orb was once on display on the lawn in front of St James's Church as an example of the perfidy of the mutineers; it is now discreetly tucked away behind the Church. On top of the Ridge stands a miniature English-styled Qutab Minar known as Jeetgarh—the victory fort. More interesting than these is the European cemetery in an obscure corner between the Kashmiri Gate post office and the rail track. Many English men and women who fell in the historic confrontation sleep under soot-covered graves.

Delhi's lanes are of different dimensions and have distinct personalities inherited from the castes and occupations of their original inhabitants. Some have intriguing names which have no present-day connotation. There is Ballimaran (those who ply oars), once the street of boatmen of the Yamuna. It later became famous for the many physicians (*hakims*) practising the *Yunani* (Greek) system of medicine. Today it is known for its association with Delhi's greatest poet, Asadullah Khan Ghalib, who lived in a bylane known as Gali Qasim Jan. There is a Kucha Chabuck Sawaran (riders with the whip), now without any cavaliers in residence. A more amusing relic is named after a local dignitary who, while drawing a stipend from the Marathas, supplied information to the British. The locals gave his residence the name *Haveli Namak Haraman* (the lane of one untrue to his salt). When the British became rulers of Delhi the Maratha dignitary protested to the Resident against the slur on his reputation. The Resident, who had a sense of humour, had it announced by beat of drum that anyone who called the lane *namak haraman* would be punished—and thus preserved the name for posterity.

One of the broader and historic lanes is Dariba running from Chandni Chowk to the Jama Masjid. It has always been the street of jewellers, goldsmiths and silversmiths. It came in for special attention at the hands of Nadir Shah's marauders. Even today the connoisseur of precious stones will go to Dariba rather than to modern emporia for his purchases.

Leading off from all major bazaars are smaller *galis* or *kuchas* opening into *katra* markets dealing with their own brands of goods, for example, indigo (Katra Nil), pearls (Moti Bazaar), silver and gold braids (Kinari Bazaar), cut pieces, saris, condiments—just about everything.

The changes in the pattern of living that have taken place within the walled city since the days of Shah Jahan are more superficial than real. The older people rise, as

did their forefathers four centuries ago, well before dawn. From the dark, dimly starlit streets a steady stream of humanity begins to flow towards the Red Fort, skirts past its walls and scatters itself on the banks of the Yamuna. There are several *ghats* (bathing places) on the river bank stretching from Nigambodh, the city's chief cremation ground where half-a-dozen pyres are ablaze, to the massive iron rail and road bridge downstream which spans the river. Men and women separate to go to their respective *ghats*. They mumble their prayers as they dip themselves in the river in the belief that the waters that cleanse their bodies also cleans them of their sins. Some stay by the riverside till the dawn to offer water to the rising sun; some feed gulls or monkeys or watch trains rumble over the iron bridge. Then they wend their way back through Chandni Chowk to their homes. At the same time from several minarets the muezzins proclaim the greatness of Allah and remind the faithful that it is the time for *Sehri*—the morning prayer. This is exactly as the muezzin had done in the times of the Mughals except that today they use micro-phones to magnify the glory of God.

Trucks (it used to be bullock carts) that have been coming in through the night loaded with fresh fruit and vegetables from the countryside are unloaded at the various *subzimandis*—vegetable markets; Gujjar milkmen go around on their bicycles supplying milk to their customers; there are long queues at milk booths awaiting vans of the Delhi Milk Scheme.

And so a noisy day begins. In Delhi no housewife need go out shopping because all she needs is delivered at her doorstep. A succession of hawkers come round melodiously chanting their wares. Delhi's beggars also have their own sing-song to attract attention and extract alms. Loud-speakers blare film music; transistor radios play film music; everyone has to talk loudly to be heard. Delhi's lanes and bylanes are not everyone's idea of a stroll. They wind tortuously and some are so narrow that not more than two persons can walk abreast. And there are always overpowering smells of open-sewers and pungent odours of spices. You wonder why Dilliwallas are so attached to them and would rather die in their *mohallas* than live elsewhere. Whatever else anyone may say against them, no one can deny that they are colourful, noisy and cheerful.

The noise and bustle continue late into the evening. Once more the temple bells toll in a hundred little temples as the gods are laid to rest for the night. And in the deepening gloom the voices of muezzins call the faithful to assemble for the evening prayer.

New Delhi

British presence in Delhi, as we have noticed earlier, dates from 1803 when Lord Lake defeated the Marathas. The Mughal Emperor continued to hold court but his writ did not run beyond the confines of the Red Fort. Though he still regarded the people of Hindustan as his subjects, the only people he governed were ladies of the seraglio, their innumerable offspring known as the *salateen* (said to have numbered over 2,000), eunuchs and retainers. He became the *roi fainéant*; the British Resident

the *roi de facto*. This uneasy relationship ended in 1857 with the expulsion of Bahadur Shah Zafar. The Red Fort was cleared of the *salateen*. Large numbers of the Omarah were dispossessed. Many impoverished ladies who had been concubines or mistresses of the aristocracy were forced to earn their livelihood. The entire length of Chawri Bazaar running from the western wall of the Jama Masjid to Ajmere Gate and some adjoining lanes became the abodes of dancers, singers, prostitutes and erstwhile *khwajasards* or *hijdas* (hermaphrodites).

The British capital remained in Calcutta where a large Anglo-Indian community had grown up. But even the British sensed that the Indians regarded Delhi as the real seat of the empire of Hindustan. When Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India in 1877, the Viceroy, Lord Lytton, chose to make the proclamation in Delhi. When Edward VII became King Emperor his accession was also proclaimed by Lord Curzon in Delhi. These Durbars created the impression that the return of the capital to Delhi was only a matter of time.

Lord Hardinge decided to take the final step. On 25 August 1911 he addressed a note to the Secretary of State for India saying: 'Delhi is still a name to conjure with. It is intimately associated in the minds of Hindus with sacred legends which go back even beyond the dawn of history. It is in the plains of Delhi that the Pandava princes fought with the Kauravas the epic struggle recorded in the Mahabharata and celebrated on the banks of the Yamuna the famous sacrifice which consecrated their titles to empire. The Purana Qila still marks the site of the city which they founded and called Indraprastha, barely five kilometres from the south gate of the modern city of Delhi. To the Mahomedans it would be a source of unbounded gratification to see the ancient capital of the Mughals restored to its proud position as the seat of Empire. Throughout India, as far south as the Mahomedan conquest extended, every walled town has its "Delhi Gate", and among the masses of the people it is still revered as the seat of the former Empire. The change would strike the imagination of the people of India as nothing else could, would send a wave of enthusiasm throughout the country and would be accepted by all as the assertion of an unfaltering determination to maintain British rule in India.'

The Marquess of Crewe, Secretary of State for India, wrote eloquently in support of the transfer: 'Not only do the ancient walls of Delhi enshrine an Imperial tradition comparable with that of Constantinople or with that of Rome itself, but the near neighbourhood of the existing city formed the theatre for some most notable scenes in the old-time drama of Hindu history celebrated in the vast treasure house of national epic verse. To the races of India for whom the legends and the records of the past are charged with so intense a meaning, this resumption by the Paramount Power of the seat of venerable Empire should at once enforce the continuity, and promise the permanency of British sovereign rule over the length and breadth of the country. Historical reasons will thus prove to be political reasons of deep importance and of real value in favour of the proposed change.'

The matter was kept secret till King George and Queen Mary came to Delhi. At a grand Royal Durbar held a couple of miles beyond the northern wall of the city (still known as Kingsway Camp) the King announced the transfer of the capital from

Calcutta to Delhi: 'On geographical, historical and political grounds, the capital of the Empire should be Delhi. . . .' He also expressed the intention to build a new city. He said: 'It is my desire that the planning and designing of the public buildings to be erected will be considered with the greatest deliberation and care, so that the new creation may be in every way worthy of its ancient and beautiful city.'

The King was so eager to get on with the job of building a new Delhi that, without consulting town planners, he laid the foundation stones at the place where the Durbar had been held.

A committee of experts sent from London declared the Kingsway Camp site unsuitable and recommended the area between Paharganj (where New Delhi railway station is today) and the village Malcha along the ridge. The two architects, Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker, who had been engaged to design the new city agreed with the recommendation. Lord Hardinge himself chose the spot where the Viceregal palace (now the President's) was to be built. In his book *My Indian Years* he wrote: 'I then (after rejecting the Malcha site) mounted and asked Hailey, Commissioner of Delhi, to accompany me to choose a new site, and we galloped over the plain to a hill some distance away. From the top of the hill there was a magnificent view, embracing Old Delhi and all the principal monuments situated outside the town, the Yamuna winding its way like a silver streak in the foreground at a little distance. I said at once to Hailey: "This is the site for Government House", and he readily agreed.'

Lord Hardinge was of the opinion that the chief buildings—the Viceregal lodge, the secretariats and the parliament—should be in the traditional Indian style. He was reinforced in his opinion by the King who had been deeply impressed by Mughal architecture. Lutyens and Baker were taken round to see India's famous buildings—the Buddhist stupas of Sarnath and Sanchi, the temples in south India, the Taj Mahal at Agra, the palaces of Bikaner and Mandu. Neither were impressed. 'Personally I do not believe there is any real Indian architecture or any great tradition,' wrote Lutyens. 'These are just spurts by various mushroom dynasties.' Baker agreed that despite its charm Indian architecture did not have 'the constructive and geometric qualities necessary to embody the idea of law and order which has been produced out of chaos by British administration.' Christopher Hussey, the biographer of Edwin Lutyens, writes that it was felt that the new city should be made 'the occasion for planned architecture of great majesty; an Anglo-Indian Rome.' In a note to Lutyens, Baker wrote: 'It must not be Indian, nor English, nor Roman, but it must be Imperial. In 2000 years there must be an Imperial Lutyens tradition in Indian architecture, as there now clings a memory of Alexander. On the day you sail you should feel like Alexander when he crossed the Hellespont to conquer Asia.' However, in the rough sketches they made concessions to their patron's view by adapting some features of old Indian buildings, such as the sun-breaker (*chajja*), the latticed window (*jali*), the umbrella dome (*chattri*). In Baker's words, the blueprints had 'the eternal beauty of classical architecture grafted on it'. It was left to Lutyens to get the Viceroy and the King to agree. Lutyens was gifted with a honeyed tongue and had no difficulty in winning over

Lady Hardinge to his point of view. The Vicereine persuaded the Viceroy who readily approved of the first sketches. Lutyens and Baker worked them out in great detail on their voyage back to England. Lutyens presented them to the King at a dinner at Buckingham Palace and had no difficulty in getting royal approval. Land was acquired from the villages. It is hard to believe that the very land which is today valued at over a thousand rupees a square yard was taken by the government for less than a rupee per acre.

Lutyens had grandiose designs for the new city. The centre piece was to be the Viceregal palace on the crest of a ridge, with Mughal-style gardens in its rear and the two secretariat buildings designed by Baker flanking either side of a broad road (then Kingsway, now Rajpath) going down the slope, through the War Memorial arch (India Gate), right up to the Purana Qila—the site of Indraprastha, the first city of Delhi. Beside the north block of the secretariat was the circular colonnaded Parliament House with a road leading to Connaught Circus and resuming its course through the wall of Shahjahanabad up to Jama Masjid. He also suggested damming the Jamuna near Humayun's tomb and creating a large ornamental lake. Not all of Lutyens' plans were sanctioned. He was also embittered because his plan to build the viceregal palace on a level higher than the secretariat was rejected. Nevertheless, the basic concept of New Delhi remained as Lutyens had envisaged it.

Lutyens and Baker divided their work evenly. Lutyens took over the plan of the general outlay of the city, with two big buildings—the viceregal palace and the War Memorial arch. Baker designed the two secretariats and Parliament House. There were other public buildings—the Commander-in-Chief's house, government archives, and bungalows for the officers, clerks' quarters, etc., which were also equally shared. Assisting them was a string of talented juniors—Greaves, Shoosmith, Walter George and Medd. The execution of the plans was entrusted to the Public Works Department, then under Sir Hugh Keeling (hence Keeling Road, recently renamed Tolstoy Marg); the chief engineers were Sir Alexander Rouse (hence Rouse Avenue, now called Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg) and later Sir Teja Singh Malik, who became the first Indian incumbent of the post.

New Delhi had an inauspicious beginning. Lord Hardinge, who was to inaugurate the new city, came to Delhi on 23 December 1912. He was riding in procession through Chandni Chowk when a bomb was hurled on his elephant, killing his umbrella-bearer and seriously wounding him. However, the construction work started. But before much could be done World War I broke out and all the energies of the government were diverted to fighting the Germans. Building was taken up again in earnest after 1918.

The going was not easy. Lord Hardinge's initial enthusiasm waned as Lutyen's estimates for the projected city mounted. He became peevish and began to find fault with everything, particularly the magnitude of Lutyen's plans. Lutyens hit back. "The Viceroy thinks only of what the palace will be like in three years' time. 300 is what I think of.' Lutyens turned his courtly charm on the Vicereine. For some time Lady Hardinge became the chief patroness of the nebulous city. Once when she pulled up Lutyens for wilfully disobeying her instructions, he promised to

make amends by washing her feet with his tears and drying them with his hair. 'It is true I have very little hair,' he added, 'but then you have such very little feet.' He was readily forgiven.

Lady Hardinge's patronage did not last long. Her son was wounded at Flanders. The over-anxious mother lost her health and died before her son succumbed to his injuries. Preoccupation with the war and the absence of viceregal enthusiasm put the plans for the building of New Delhi in cold storage. Only Lutyens and Baker continued to dream of the city they would raise on Raisina Hill. Herbert Baker records how one evening he and two of his friends stood on the ridge looking down 'the deserted cities of dreary and disconsolate tombs' and wondering how the new city would rise. The sky was overcast and it rained intermittently. Suddenly, the clouds lifted and the sun broke through. 'A brilliant rainbow formed a perfect arch on what was destined to be a great vista, where Lutyens' memorial arch now stands. We acclaimed it was a good omen.'

The Lutyens-Baker partnership did not last long. They fell out over the question of the level of the Viceregal palace *vis-á-vis* the secretariats. Lutyens wanted the ruler of the country to be housed at a higher level than his civil servants. Baker wanted the acropolis—as the secretariats and the palace buildings had come to be known—to be on the same level to conform to the prevailing notions of democracy. Baker won. Lutyens next desired the road between the secretariats to be on a sharp gradient so that the viceregal palace was distinctly visible from a distance. Baker disagreed. Baker won again. Lutyens became peevish and fought 'the battle of the gradient' to the bitter end. The two architects were not on speaking terms for many years.

The supply of raw material presented another problem. The architects had planned to quarry the ridge to make an amphitheatre and use the stone so dug up for other buildings. The quartzite on the ridge was found unsuitable; the plan to build an open-air theatre was abandoned. It was decided to quarry the Vindhyan stone used by the Mughals; white and buff stone from Dholpur; red from Bharatpur; marble from Makrana, Alwar, Jaisalmer, Baroda and Ajmer. To get Badarpur sand and rubble, a twenty-four kilometre light railway (Imperial Delhi Railway) with eight kilometres of siding was made. Transportation costs upset all estimates. Lutyens' rough guess of £ 10 million came closest the mark. But even Lutyens did not expect that instead of four to five years, New Delhi would take almost sixteen to look like a city.

Lutyens' puckish sense of humour sustained his enthusiasm in those trying times. Once when the Duke of Connaught asked him why he had hung bells from the tops of columns, Lutyens replied, 'Did you never hear, Sir, of the Mughal superstition that the ringing of bells proclaimed the end of a dynasty?'

Slowly a new city began to rise on the escarpment. By 1922 most of the stone had been delivered on the site. The stone yard at New Delhi was the biggest in the world; 3,500 stone masons worked in its sheds. Brick kilns went up in the suburbs. The quantity of brick consumed was astronomical—700 million. Lutyens took interest in every detail. The most important was the planting of trees. W. R. Mustoe

of the horticultural department established a nursery with 500 varieties of trees at Safdarjung. Most of them indigenous; others were imported from Australia or East Africa. As soon as the roads had been marked, trees were planted. They began to rise with the public buildings and bungalows. Lutyens chose wood for Viceregal furnishings and instructed cabinet makers. Likewise, carpets, pictures and murals were made under his instructions. And all this was done with the co-operation of a succession of Viceroys and civil servants.

The last day of the year 1929 was set as the target date for the completion of the three major buildings on the acropolis and the India Gate (bearing names of 13,516 of the 70,000 Indians killed in the First War). For many months, work went on round the clock. The formal inauguration of New Delhi took place in January 1931. The kind of tragedy that had soured Hardinge against India was repeated. An attempt was made by terrorists to blow up the train in which Lord Irwin was coming to New Delhi. Fortunately, the Viceroy was unhurt and unshaken. He went through the inaugural ceremonies with British *sang froid*. Lutyens records his entry into the viceregal palace:'The ceremony proceeded. Then H.E. went up the stairway to the great portico, where I and others were presented to him. At a given signal the doors were opened (there was no key, as there was no lock). They went into the House, and for the first time in seventeen years the house was closed on me.'

Lutyens was also present at the first official banquet given by the Viceroy. He believed that this was to be his last visit to the place. He later confessed to a friend, 'I had not the nerve to say goodbye to Irwin. I just walked out, and I kissed the wall of the House.' This was however not Lutyens' last visit. He was consulted many times for inscriptions that should go on some of the monuments. Could Lutyens suggest what should be inscribed on the Jaipur Column? asked Lord Irwin. This was too good an opportunity for Lutyens to miss. 'No dogs must be allowed on the ramp,' he wrote back. While the Viceroy was still digesting the quip, Lutyens forwarded a more serious suggestion:

'Endow your thought with faith
Your deed with courage
Your life with sacrifice
So all men may know
The greatness of India.'

Lord Irwin distilled from this the conciser version used:

'In thought faith; in word wisdom
In deed courage; in life service
So may India be great.'

The inscription on the throne was suggested by the talented painter-wife of the engineer, Shoosmith. It was taken from 'Proverbs': 'Wisdom resteth in the heart of him that hath understanding.'

Lutyens' last visit to the city he had designed was in the autumn of October 1938. Lord Linlithgow invited him to repair the damage done by the wilful Lady Willingdon: she had the furniture and fittings of the palace changed to her favourite colour, mauve, and she had many of Mustoe's trees in the Mughal Gardens uprooted and replaced by rows of cypress. Lutyens was very upset and did the best he could to restore the old design. But he could do nothing to the Irwin stadium built in Willingdon's regime. The stadium blocked Purana Qila from view.

Much has been said and written on the architecture of New Delhi. Most of the criticism has been levelled against Baker's buildings. Lutyens' work has been universally acclaimed as 'frozen music'. And of Lutyens' buildings, the Rashtrapati Bhavan of today is a veritable masterpiece. Captain Swinton, who had first seen the barren escarpment and then the completed building, exulted, 'There has now risen before us in all its majesty, the Viceroy's House—one looks, one accepts, one marvels.'

Perhaps the finest tribute to the new city paid by an Indian was by the poet-politician, Sarojini Naidu:

> Imperial City! dowered with sovereign grace
> To thy renascent glory still there clings
> The splendid tragedy of ancient things,
> The regal woes of many a vanquished race;
> And memory's tears are cold upon thy face
> E'en while thy heart's returning gladness rings
> Loud on the sleep of thy forgotten kings,
> Who in thine arms sought Life's last resting place.
>
> Thy changing kings and kingdoms pass away
> The gorgeous legends of bygone day,
> But thou dost still immutably remain
> Unbroken symbol of proud histories,
> Unageing priestess of old mysteries
> Before whose shrine the spells of Death are vain.

In the last thirty years that India has been independent, Delhi has grown beyond recognition. It now stretches nearly 32 kilometres from North to South and almost as much from across the Yamuna river in the East and spilling over the ridge to the West. All the innumerable cities that once claimed to be seats of Empire have been swallowed up to become one huge city. In between ancient battlements and mausoleums have risen modern multi-storeyed buildings, shopping centres, picture palaces, art galleries, five-star hotels, restaurants, play grounds, stadia and some of the most beautiful parks one can see anywhere in the world. In one area known as Chanakyapuri or the Diplomatic Enclave, foreign embassies and High Commissions have built their own chanceries. After Calcutta and Bombay, Delhi with over 5 million inhabitants has become the third most populous city of India.

The recent history of India is enshrined in two houses on either side of the roundabout facing Claridges Hotel. Facing it is the residence of the Netherlands' ambassador. Till August 1947 it was the residence of Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founding father of Pakistan. Behind the hotel is Birla House, where Mahatma Gandhi was living during the fateful days of the division of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. The two great men often met each other in these houses. When Mr Jinnah went off to Karachi to take over as Governor-General of Pakistan, Mahatma Gandhi went touring villages torn by Hindu-Muslim strife. When riots erupted in Delhi he returned to Delhi and undertook a fast to death unless India redeemed its promise to give Pakistan its share of the partition money. For some days irate mobs of Hindu and Sikh refugees who had been forced to flee from Pakistan clamoured for Gandhi's blood. As Gandhiji's condition deteriorated the same people sat in silence on the road outside praying for his life and signing pledges in their own blood begging Gandhi to give up his fast. Suddenly peace came to the strife-ridden city. But this was too much for people whose minds were crazed with hate. On 30 January 1948, as Gandhiji was walking up to the garden to attend his evening prayer meeting, Nathu Ram Godse fired three shots into him. With the name of Ram on his lips, Gandhiji collapsed and died. The house where this tragic episode took place has now become a place of pilgrimage (as has Rajghat where he was cremated). There is a small museum in which the main episodes of his life are depicted. You can see the path he took to keep his final tryst with destiny and hear recordings of his voice. The road has been named after the event, *Tees Janvary Marg*.

The Birla family has given another gift to New Delhi. This is the Birla Temple at the base of the ridge. It is a massive marble building and has all the deities of the Hindu pantheon (as well as Sikh gurus and Jesus Christ) represented in it. It has become perhaps the most popular temple of the city. It is a good place to refresh your information on popular Hinduism. Another house which has acquired historical importance is the one in which Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru lived as Prime Minister of India till he died on 27 May 1964. It was originally designed to be the residence of the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. After Nehru's death, it was converted into a museum and Library. A *Son et Lumiere* programme tells the story of Nehru's life.

Since Delhi has a little of everything that can be found in India and the world it has also a very wide range of cuisines. Like other capitals of the world it has its five-star hotels with restaurants specializing in European (mainly French and Italian) and Chinese dishes. Of foreign cuisines, the Chinese has become the most popular. Scattered all over the city and suburbs are restaurants serving Cantonese and Szechwan dishes. Japanese, Korean and Arab restaurants have also come up.

Delhi has a historic cuisine of its own which traces its ancestry from the palace kitchens of the Mughal Emperors and is known after them as *Mughlai*. This consists of a large number of meat delicacies like *kababs* (*Shami* or Syrian style, as well as *seekh*—cooked on skewers), *barrah, biryanis* (saffron rice with meat) and bread of various kinds ranging from the doughy *naan* to the paper-thin *roomali* (kerchief-like). In addition there are a large variety of chutneys including the famous *nav-ratan*

(nine gems) and pickles made of meats and vegetables. There are several Mughlai restaurants in the bazaars around the Jama Masjid which have recently opened branches in New Delhi.

A cuisine very similar to the Mughlai but tracing its descent from the style of cooking prevalent in the North-West Frontier Province (now in Pakistan) and Western Punjab has gained immense popularity all over the country. Its most famous dishes are *tandoori* (oven) baked chicken, fish and other meats. The Punjabis have their own favourites, mainly *saag* (spinach) made of mustard leaf with cornflour bread (*makai ki roti*). They never stop exulting over these delicacies and their favourite dessert *gajar ka halwa* (carrot pudding). These three items are *de rigeur* on a Punjabi gourmet's menu throughout the autumn and winter months.

Delhi also has its own traditional vegetarian cuisine based on fried *puris*, *kachaurees* or *parathas* eaten with freshly cooked vegetables, mainly spring potatoes. This traditional vegetarian food is usually served at weddings and on festivals in private homes and is rarely available in restaurants. For vegetarian delicacies Delhi now relies on south Indian restaurants which have mushroomed everywhere. South Indian food (largely *idli*, *dosa* with *rasam* and coconut chutney) has the unique quality of being spicy without being too hot, tasty without being rich or heavy, and, above all, fulfilling without being expensive. You can eat your belly-full in under three rupees and wash it down with a cup of steaming south Indian coffee served in a metal tumbler.

The city specializes in another variety of dishes meant only for those with a taste for the sour, spicy and the chilli-hot. There are several famous *chaatwalas* in different parts of the city. Young people (*chaat* can have a lethal gaseous effect on ageing digestions) huddle around the *golguppa* or *pani puri* stalls swallowing quantities of bulbous miniature *puris* dipped in *jeera* (cumin seed) sauce. It is followed by plates of sliced potatoes, *puris* sprinkled with curds and highly spiced sauces.

Delhi's own brands of ice-creams should not be missed. The *petiwala* whose creams are frozen in a wrap of flannel has become a rare sight, but the *kulfi* (cream frozen in sealed metal containers inside a big pitcher of ice) continues to be a great favourite. The *kulfi* has a flavour distinct from the European-style ice-cream. It is undoubtedly heavier in calories but it is infinitely more satisfying than the watery concoctions served by ice-cream parlours. *Kulfi* is usually served with *falooda* (vermicelli), which serves the same purpose as a wafer to take the edge off the *kulfi*'s iciness.

The poorer Dilliwalas have their own eating places. The *dhaba* is a roadside trattoria where you sit on chairs or charpoys laid out on the pavement. The chappatis are baked in an open-air *tandoor*. You are charged by the chappati—the vegetable and the large helpings of raw onions are thrown in free of charge. Some of these *dhabas* have become favourites of gourmets.

Every Indian meal should end with a betel-leaf (*paan*). The betel leaf is no relative of the betel nut which goes in it. And neither have any connection with any insect of the beetle species. The betel leaf comes from a creeper grown under cover to protect

it from the sun. There are many varieties of this creeper grown in different parts of India. Of the popular varieties, the Banaras, Maghai (the most expensive), the Calcutta and Desi (native) are the best known. The betel nut comes from the areca palm (a relative of the coconut) and is grown extensively in east and south India. It is a marble-sized, woody nut which is sliced into small pieces to go in the betel leaf. Other ingredients of the *paan* are lime and catechu paste. Sliced coconut, chutneys, scented tobacco and other savouries are added according to taste. The betel leaf is astringent and mouth cleansing. Ladies of aristocratic families carry silver caskets (*paan daans*) with the necessary ingredients. *Paan* making is cultivated as an art in an upper-class traditional Indian home as tea-making is in Japan.

New Delhi is the city of the bureaucracy. Every morning at 9 a.m. a siren sounds to inform the bureaucrats that it is time for them to leave for the office. A stream of cycles, scooters, buses and cars moves towards the secretariats. The *Babu* ethos pervades New Delhi's social life. The men are status-conscious because of their jobs; the women because of their husbands. They have devised subtle ways of finding out whether a newly arrived lady is the wife of a nobody or somebody like an under secretary, deputy secretary, joint secretary, additional secretary or a full secretary. And the newcomer is equally quick to pick up the code of transmission. The old hand will ask a seemingly innocent question: 'Mrs Das, where are you staying?' (In New Delhi your address is as good an indicator of your salary as your bank balance.) Mrs Das will reply in the same innocent tone, 'We are temporarily putting up in *Neecha Nagar* under secretary level but we soon hope to get our proper allotment in *Ooncha Nagar* joint secretary and upwards.

Membership of clubs is another indication of social status. If you belong to the Golf Club or Gymkhana, you are upper caste. The Sports Club, Chelmsford, Panchsheel or any other club puts you in a lower category of the social hierarchy. Car and car number plates also indicate both affluence and bureaucratic importance. Foreign cars are largely owned by foreigners—you need not be unduly impressed by their size because most are imported tax-free. But when you see an Indian riding in one, you can be sure he is either a diplomat returned home or an industrialist who has been able to pay upwards of a couple of lakhs to buy it from the State Trading Corporation. More often it will belong to someone who has acquired wealth by shady means.

But even Indian-made Ambassadors, Fiats and Heralds, often bear status symbols. A miniature flagpole on the bonnet indicates that it belongs to someone who was once a minister or aspires to be one soon. Car numbers are even surer guides to importance. The smaller the number on the plates the more important the owner of the car. Numbers between 1 to 9 invariably belong to the State's top bureaucrats. Everyone avoids number 10 because the decimal stands for a *goonda* (the register in a police station listing names of bad characters is numbered 10). Likewise 420 is avoided because section 420 of the Indian Penal Code defines a cheat and a fraud. Others like 1111 or 4444 are good currency. In such a status-conscious society, the hostess has a devil of a job keeping her guests happy. One error in seating can lead to disaster. It is safest to have buffet dinners and let guests find their own social level.

New Delhi has a sizeable foreign community estimated at over 1000 families. It has over 100 embassies and offices of international organizations. For good reason social life revolves round the foreigners. They are eager to befriend Indians so that they can learn more about the country. Indians are great talkers and much as they may dislike conditions in their own country, they regard it as their patriotic duty to speak only of what is good about India. As the number of 'dry days' increase, the price of liquor shoots up, the locals become increasingly enthusiastic in celebrating National Days of foreign nations. A popular joke amongst Dilliwalas is about brands of scotch. 'My favourite is the O.P.', says one. 'O.P.? Never heard of it,' replies the other. 'You don't know O.P.? It's the best brand there is. O.P. stands for other people's.' If you have necessary *savoire faire* you can live in New Delhi drinking and dining free of charge all the 365 days of the year. The late Mr Plomer's description of life in Bloomsbury in the 1930s is applicable to the life in the New Delhi of today:

> It is succession of parties for sponges and bores.
> With traffic jams outside, they turn up in their scores
> With first-rate sherry flowing into second-rate whores
> And third-rate conversation without one single pause.

Delhi has always had its characters. During Mughal times there were the *Bankas*—fops who loved to appear in outlandish attire, wore perfume, chewed expensive *paans* and sauntered about the bazaars with their cronies. Some shaved their heads but grew long beards; others shaved only one side of the mustachio. Some wore only one leg of the pantaloon; others went fully clothed in armour. They formed gangs of their own which often clashed with each other. But they were generally 'goodies', urban Robin Hoods who fought bullies, saved the weak from harassment and were consequently respected. The *Bankas* are gone; the typical Dilliwala has been submerged in the sea of anonymity. But there are many people—writers, poets, painters and plain, not-so-simple eccentrics—who have become landmarks on the landscape of the city. Their homes and ateliers are sought after by the residents and visitors who wish to get a peep into the way creative people live. Most of these human landmarks are only first generation Dilliwallas. We can't meet all of them; so we choose one who is perhaps the best known Indian in the world of letters.

Nirad C. Chaudhuri is over 80. Small, wizened, immaculately dressed in expensive European suits when out of his house; in plain Bengali style kurta-dhoti when he is at home. Although Chaudhuri had been writing in Bengali for many years not many people knew about his existence till his first book in English was published in the 1950s. This was entitled *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*. And suddenly Chaudhuri was not unknown any more. He was sacked from his job in All India Radio and became the sought-after man in Delhi's social circles. This happened even before his book came to be read in Delhi. At the time India had been free for only four years and the people were understandably touchy about British rule in India. Chaudhuri had dedicated his book to 'the memory of the British Empire . . .

because all that was good and living within us was made, shaped and quickened by the same British Empire.' It was meant to needle Indians and the Minister of the department in which Chaudhuri worked was constrained to call for an explanation and then terminate his employment. Indians lapped up the book. Since it was beautifully written, Indians took his diatribes against his own people in their stride. Chaudhuri went on to write more books—each more offensive to Indian susceptibilities than the last. Within a few years he became the hero of Indian and foreign littérateurs and they did their best to be invited to the Chaudhuris' home.

The Chaudhuris lived on the top floor of a three-storeyed apartment overlooking the northern wall of the Mughal city. From the roof on one side you could see the huddle of bazaars with the Jama Masjid towering above them; on the other, lawns and gardens that lay beyond the grey walls of Shah Jahan's city. Chaudhuri was known to the locality as the *Kala Sahib*, the Indian pejorative for a wog. As he stepped out of his house into the street in his oversize solar topee, suit and tie, street urchins chanted 'Johnny Walker, Johnny Walker'. But this midget-sized man was also recognized as an intellectual giant. Stories of his fantastic knowledge about history, geography, literature, science, birds, trees, insects—everything—multiplied. People came to him to ask for autographs, hear his views (he aired his views on every subject) and seek guidance as Greeks must have sought guidance from the prophecies of the Delphic oracle.

Amongst Chaudhuri's hobbies was growing exotic plants on his roof garden. He prepared the soil himself, got bulbs and seeds from renowned growers. He had a particular fancy for a species of flowering cacti whose blossoms unfolded themselves at the hour of dawn. A chosen few were invited to the home. They came from distant suburbs to see the spectacle and hear Chaudhuri extol the virtues of cacti over breakfast. For many years before he left for Oxford to work on his biography of Max Müller, the élite of Delhi (including members of the diplomatic corps) vied with each other for the honour of celebrating Nirad Chaudhuri's birthday in their homes. He had, like the Qutab Minar and the Red Fort, become a living monument of Delhi.

Every city has a heart located near about its centre. Like the hearts of animate beings, it is from here that life-blood is pumped into the veins and arteries of a city. The heart of New Delhi is Connaught Circus named after the Duke of Connaught (uncle of King George V) who happened to visit the city at the time of its construction. It is as good a place to start with as any other.

Connaught Circus comprises a circular lawn with a large ornamental fountain in the centre and lots of flamboyant Gulmohars, Ashupals (*polyalthea longigolia*), Jarul (*lagerstroemia flos regina*) and Jamun trees around it. Encircling this lawn are double-storeyed buildings supported by colonnaded verandahs with shops on the ground floor and residential apartments on the top. Behind the inner circle are two bigger circles with similar buildings. Many roads lead out of Connaught Circus to different parts of the compass. Of these the two most popular with jay walkers are Janpath, which is usually more crowded because of its many stalls and hawkers; and

Sansad Marg, which takes off from Parliament House and resumes its course on the other side of the Circus towards the old walled city. This road was designed to give an uninterrupted three kilometre view from Parliament House to the Jama Masjid. Even today, besides the stately banyan trees, all that interrupts the view are a railway bridge and, immediately behind it, a massive statue of Shivaji on horseback.

The series of ever-widening concentric circles of Connaught Circus have a gap on the southern side where there are two rectangles. One of these has an underground market; the other is a park, a part of which has an open-air restaurant and the rest is used as a sort of speaker's corner for political meetings. Beyond this part is an imposing facade of a block of buildings consisting of cinemas, stores, a discotheque and half-a-dozen restaurants. The outer periphery of the Circus has a circumference of almost five kilometres. Over the years Connaught Circus has developed an ethos of its own. Though its cinemas, stores and restaurants have undoubtedly contributed towards the making of its personality, the more important factors are its unique style of architecture, its ornamental trees, the birds that roost on them and the humans who have become Connaught Circus characters.

Start from Hotel Imperial and go along Janpath. A bearded, beturbaned fortuneteller will sidle alongside and mumble something about what your stars foretell and thrust testimonials under your nose. One of the amusing sights of Connaught Circus are foreign visitors being trailed by these soothsayers. Equally characteristic are New Delhi's 'antique' dealers whose boutiques line the footpath outside Hotel Imperial. They don't take much notice of Indians but promptly get on 'Hey Joe!' terms of intimacy with foreigners: 'You no buy nice present for your girlfriend today?' Janpath has a long row of stalls selling textiles, jewellery, dry fruit and everything else. There are itinerant tradesmen who lay out their wares on the footpath; ladies from Gujarat and Rajasthan who carry colourful shawls, scarves and bed-covers on their shoulders; *chooran wallahs* (seller of aperients) who clang copper bells fixed on their bicycles and yell '*Lakkar Hazam, pathar hazam*'—assuring buyers that a pinch of their powder will help digest wood and stone; *rangoli* makers who stamp intricate patterns on the pavement; flute-sellers fluting soulful tunes beside china figurines of Sri Krishna. Connaught Circus has its own brand of beggars and pseudo beggars. The police periodically drive them off. But they come back and have become a part of the landscape. Young boys who speak their few sentences of English in Brooklyn accent; urchins who slap their bellies and wail 'no mama, no papa'; the 'blindwallah' who taps his white cane through the colonnade wearing a pathetic, prophetic look on his face turned heavenwards. The pseudo beggars are boys and girls who stick paper tri-colour flags on to your shirts, offer to guard your car or insist on your buying the evening paper.

Connaught Circus bustles with restaurants. Most of them have regular patrons who know each other well and make their appearances at the same hour. Everyone is on hand-waving terms with everyone else. There is little consumption of beverage—a cup of tea or coffee is made to last a couple of hours while reputations

of politicians, filmstars, artists and littérateurs are meticulously torn spoon by spoon. Outside every eating house is the ubiquitous *paanwallah* (betel-leaf seller) with his brightly polished brass tray and cups of betel nuts, tobacco, lime and catechu paste. Every connoisseur of *paan* orders his favourite betel leaf (there are over eighty kinds) and the ingredients to go in it. Then he spits the blood-red phlegm wherever it pleases him.

Connaught Circus presents different aspects in different seasons. Some prefer it in May when the Gulmohars are covered in fiery reds and yellows. Others like to see it during the monsoon when the Jamun trees are loaded with fruit and jamun-sellers spread out the fruit on the wet pavements. But most prefer the autumn and winter months when jay walking in the sunshine is pleasanter. The evenings are cool, the sky a luminous grey and the trees alive with parakeets and mynahs whose screeching drowns the roar of traffic and hawkers' cries.

Connaught Circus goes to bed early. Store lights are switched off at 7 p.m. Here and there a neon sign glimmers; a few *paanwallahs* sit patiently outside the restaurants daubing *paan* leaves with lime and catechu paste in anticipation of parties of revellers. Late nighters stop for a chat, light cigarettes from the smoking end of a rope and ogle at passers-by. They say Connaught Circus has a night life. Many a visitor has gone looking for it but only heard the tramp of his feet echoing in the silent corridors.

The best time to visit Delhi is any time that suits you. You have three cnoices: the bracing cold of the winter with clear blue skies and bright sunshine, the scorching sun and hot dust-laden winds of the summer, and the nimbus clouds with cascades of rain of the monsoon months. You can be sure of getting what you bargained for, because in Delhi the seasons keep their dates with the calender. Our oldest and most regular visitors are birds from across the snowy Himalayas. They come after the summer monsoon is over, stay through the winter months and leave when the spring gives way to summer. Most human visitors also prefer coming to Delhi between October and March.

The monsoon ends in September. Everything looks clean, green, washed and damp. There are not many flowers apart from the rusty shield bearer and the Jarul. There is not much bird song because the time of courtship and song is over, eggs have been hatched and parents are busy rearing their young. By October it becomes drier and cooler. The Chorizias come into flower and the first migrants can be seen on the jheels and the Yamuna. Many now prefer to sojourn in the zoo and renew acquaintance with the family of white tigers that live there. Wagtails and red-starts appear in the parks. If you keep a count, you may spot over 150 distinct species in your garden. There are another 150 or more species to be seen in the countryside.

With October begin a series of festivals. First comes Dussehra to celebrate the epic victory of Ram over Ravana. The entire story of the Ramayana is acted in many localities in the open and on the final day gigantic effigies of Ravana and his kinsmen set aflame on the Ram Lila Grounds alongside the southern wall of Shahjahanabad. On the moonless night following Dussehra comes Diwali, the

festival of lights. Every Hindu home and several major public buildings are festooned with lamps; rockets explode in the sky. The din can be maddeningly exciting. About the same time the Sikhs celebrate the birthdays of their Gurus and the martyrdom of Tegh Bahadur. They take their holy book in procession, escorted by men with drawn swords, parties of hymn singers and several brass bands. We can never be sure of Muslim festivals because Muslims follow the lunar calendar. But during the holy month of Ramadan and on their three Ids, they light up their mosques. Delhi does not have very many Christians, but the presence of the foreign community ensures Christmas celebrations with band music and marigolds. It is also the beginning of Delhi's brief, thirty days' of cold. The winter monsoon, which is mercifully short, brings down the temperature to near freezing. The nights are sharp but fragrant with the aroma of the queen of the night.

By mid-January the cold loosens its grip over Delhi and we know that the sun is well on its way northwards from Capricorn to Cancer. The spring festival *basant* marks the end of the brief winter: *Aaya Basant, Pala Udant*—the spring is come and the cold hath fled. On *basant* people wear yellow in honour of the mustard which is in full bloom and spreads a carpet of gold in the countryside. Republic Day (26 January) is celebrated with great pageantry. There is a march-past of the troops: police, paramilitary forces and school children. The procession begins from Rashtrapati Bhavan, goes down Rajpath where the President takes the salute, past India Gate to Connaught Circus, to the Old City, and ends at the Red Fort. Three days later there is the 'beating of the retreat' at Vijay Chowk facing the secretariats. It is a most spectacular display of colour, sound and movement. By Republic Day bougainvillaea and the scarlet ixora are in flower and roses are in bud. Barbets begin to call to assure you that spring is near.

February and March are Delhi's springtime and the season of flowers. Then Delhi is a sight for the gods. The roundabouts, gardens and public parks (particularly the Buddha Jayanti on the ridge and the Lodi Park) are a veritable riot of colour. By March, it begins to turn warm. By Holi, the festival of colours, it is warm enough for people to douse each other in coloured water. There are signs of renewal of life everywhere. Silk Cotton trees which were stark and leafless burst into fiery reds and yellows. The vine, which had been like a dry twisted rope, has pale green leaves. Bauhinias come out in purples, whites, and mauves. Golden orioles flit about the trees. Koels begin to call to each other. Hen sparrows fluff up their wings, wantonly expose their cloa and cheep invitations to their partners. On tree tops and balconies kites and vultures mate with agonizing screams.

After the Silk Cotton has shed its flowers, come the Coral, the Flame and the Jacaranda. By April when other flowers have withered, the Gulmohars blaze away in all their flamboyant glory. Mango trees are in flower. On the sandy banks of the Yamuna, water melons lie scattered about like large, green marbles. The sun scorches; hot winds blow across from the Rajasthan desert. When neither man nor beast cares to go out in the mid-day sun, labernums let down their golden petalled chandeliers. Through these hot days and nights come the rising notes of the *papeeha* (hawk cuckoo) to assure you that the days of hell fire will soon be over and the monsoon is not far away.

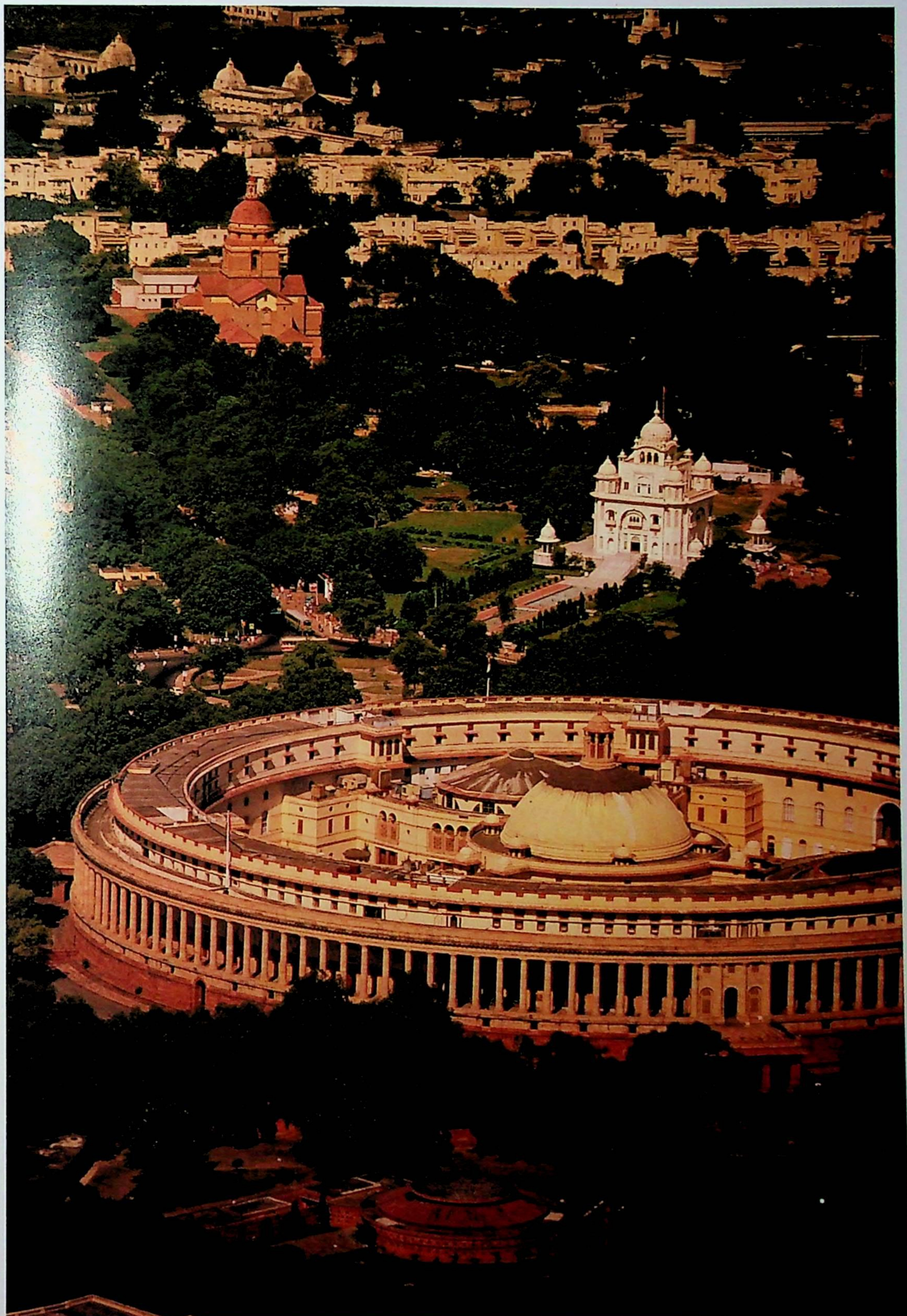
Sometime in the month of May flocks of pied-crested cuckoos leave the East African coast to ride the monsoon clouds gathering over the Arabian Sea. Early in June they arrive in the western coast of India. And by mid-June they can be heard all over Delhi. A few days later the grey, lifeless sky turns black and the monsoon bursts over the city. It is time to celebrate the coming of the rains. Parties set out to the weir at Okhla or the Qutab Minar to chew mangoes and be drenched in the rain. When the monsoons have expended their initial fury, the blue skies are full of bulbous clouds. It is time to fly kites; they fleck the skies and battle each other. As one is cut adrift, victorious cries of '*bo kata*' greet its zig-zag descent to the earch. And the cricle of seasons is complete.

Delhi may not be as it has been claimed, a paradise on earth, but it is as close to it as any city in the world.

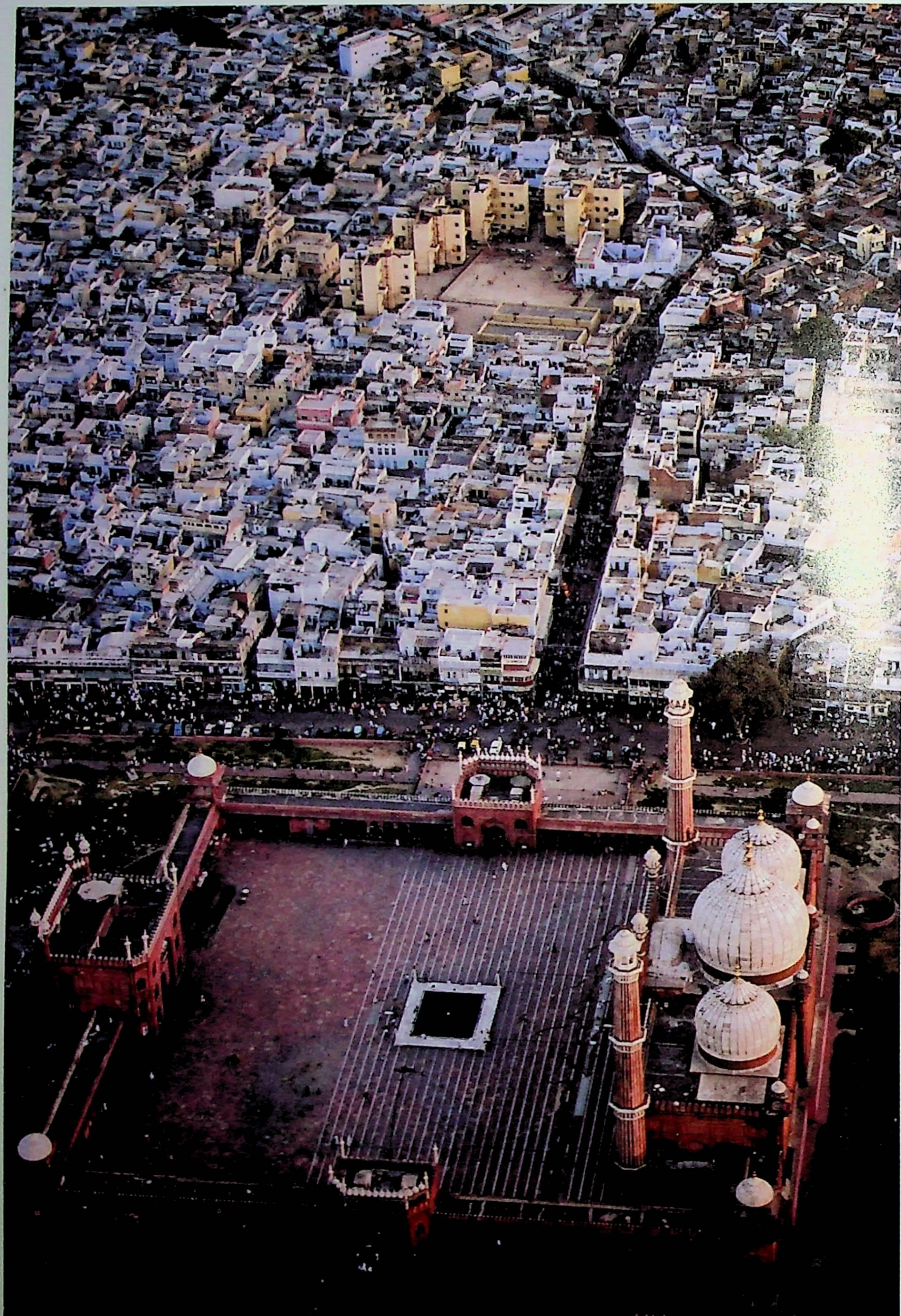
DELHI IN COLOUR



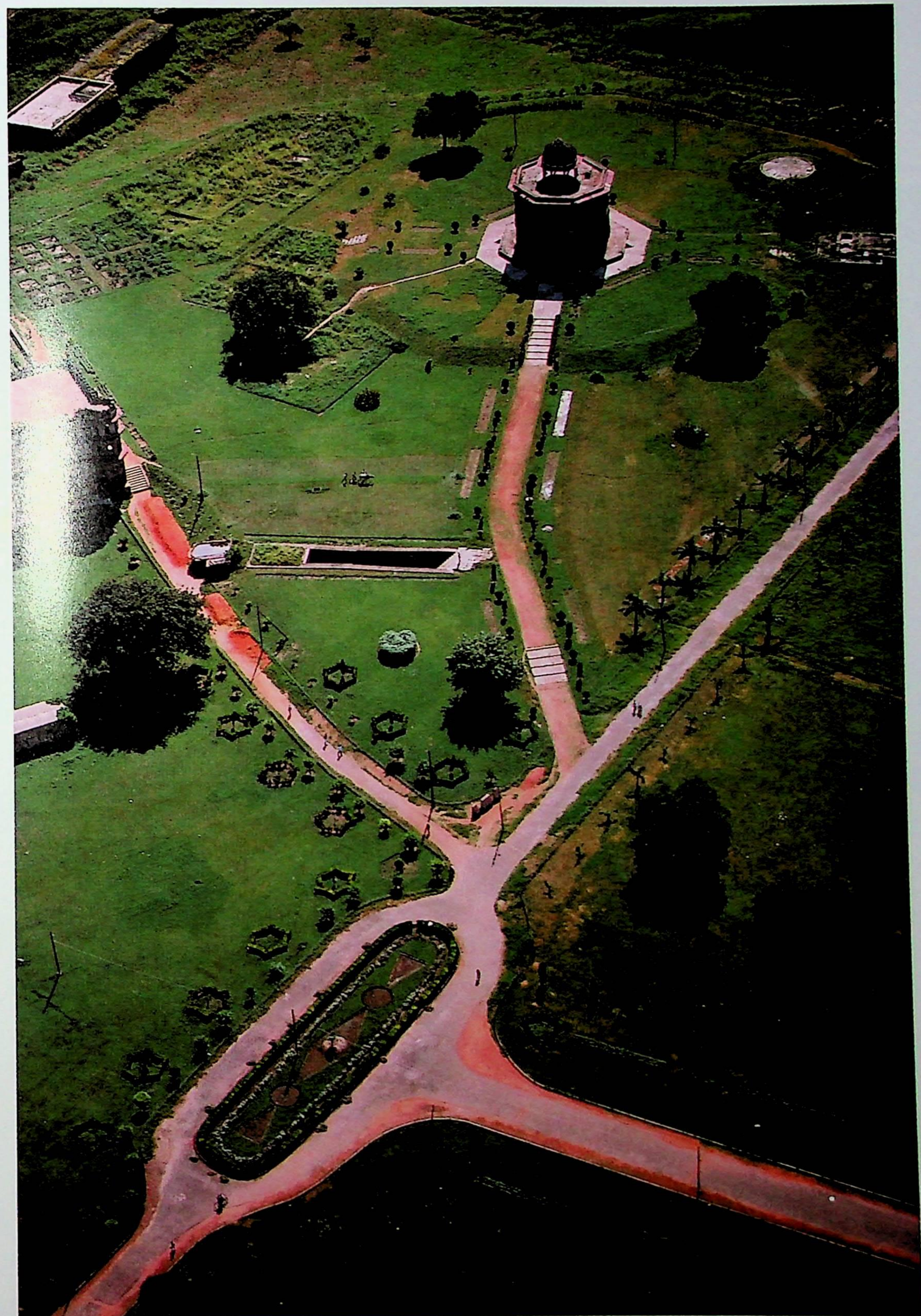
The centre-piece of New Delhi: on a hill in the distance, Rashtrapati Bhavan, flanked by the Central Secretariat. India Gate, the war memorial, is in the foreground



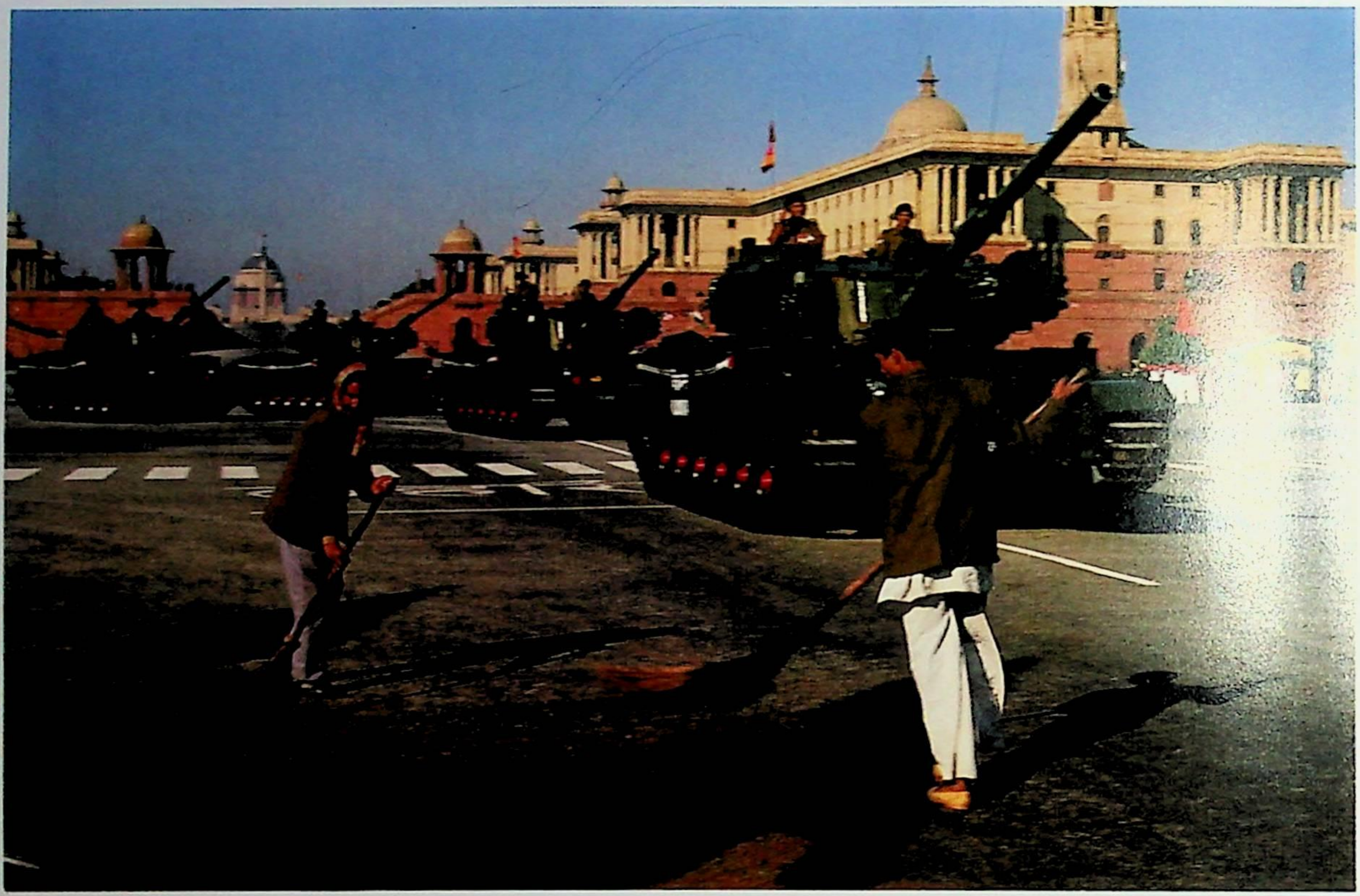
The capital of secular India: a Sikh gurdwara, a church and mosque near Parliament House, the seat of democratic power



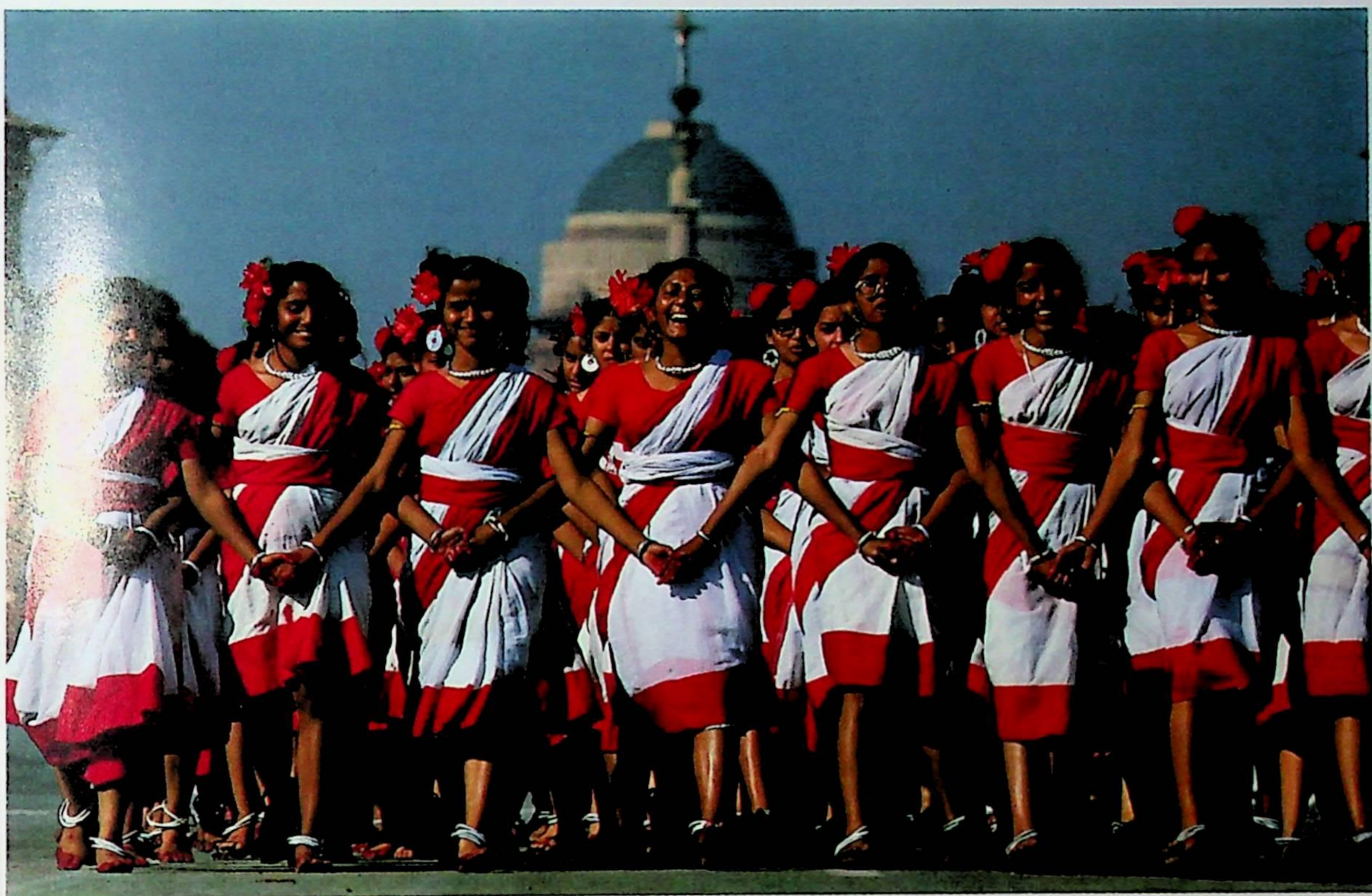
The Jama Masjid, the royal mosque built by the Emperor Shah Jahan, and now in the heart of the most congested area of Delhi



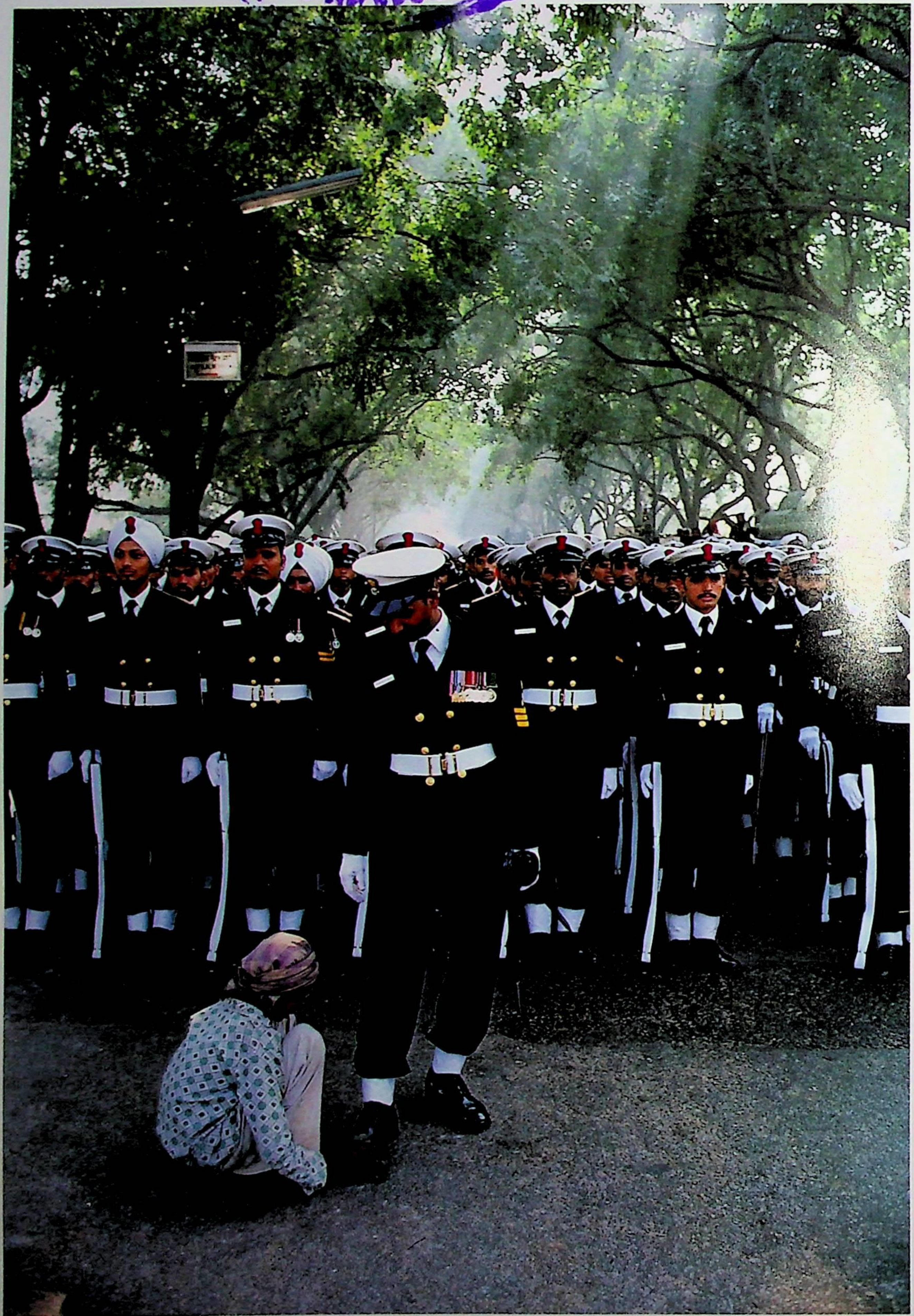
Aerial view of the Old Fort, the site of the first city of Delhi, Indraprastha



Republic Day: tanks roll down Rajpath while sweepers remove evidence of cavalry



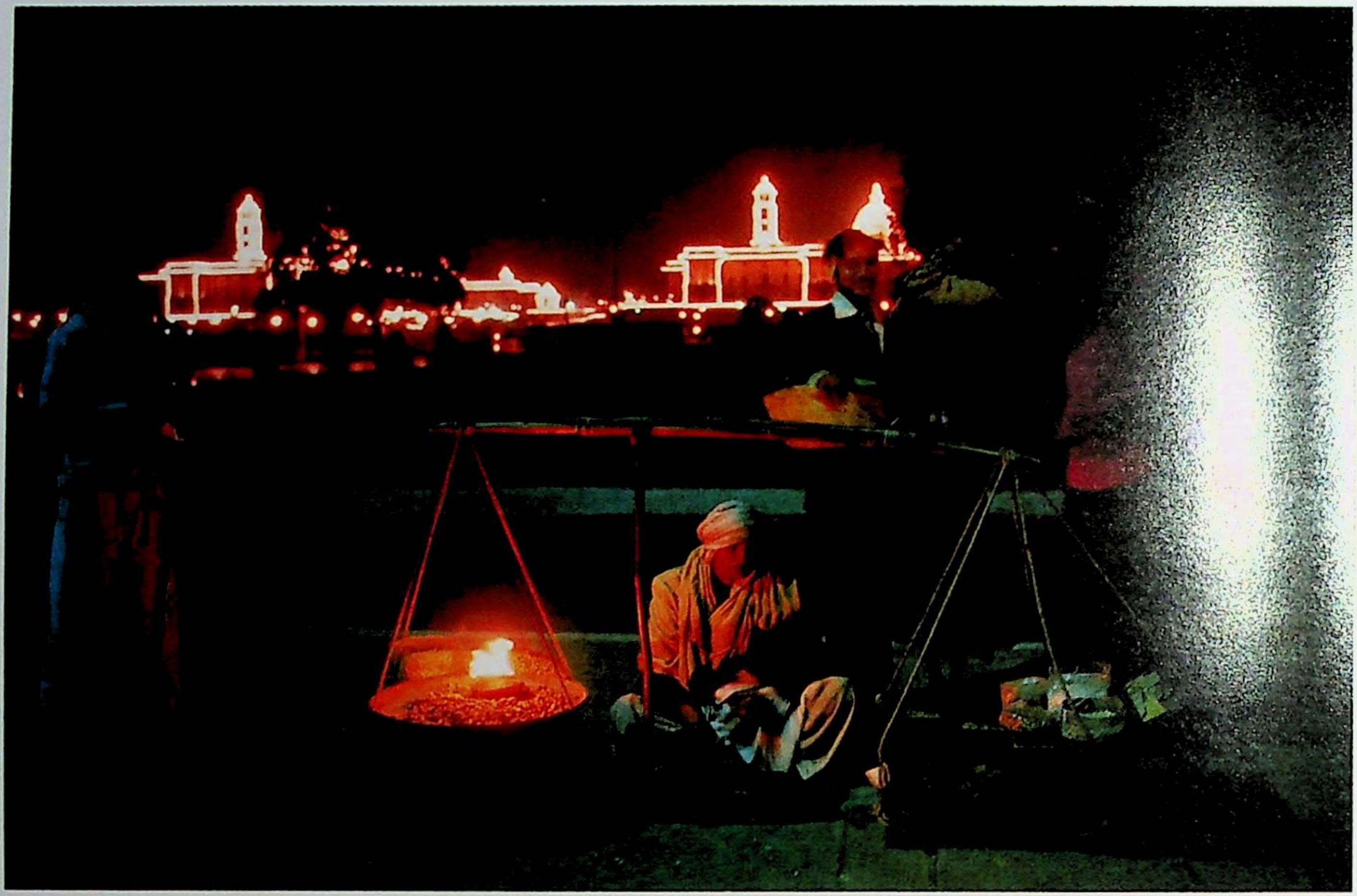
Republic Day: dancers add colour to the parade



Republic Day: the captain gets an extra shine as the naval contingent awaits its turn



Republic Day: brass bands of the armed forces contribute to the pageantry



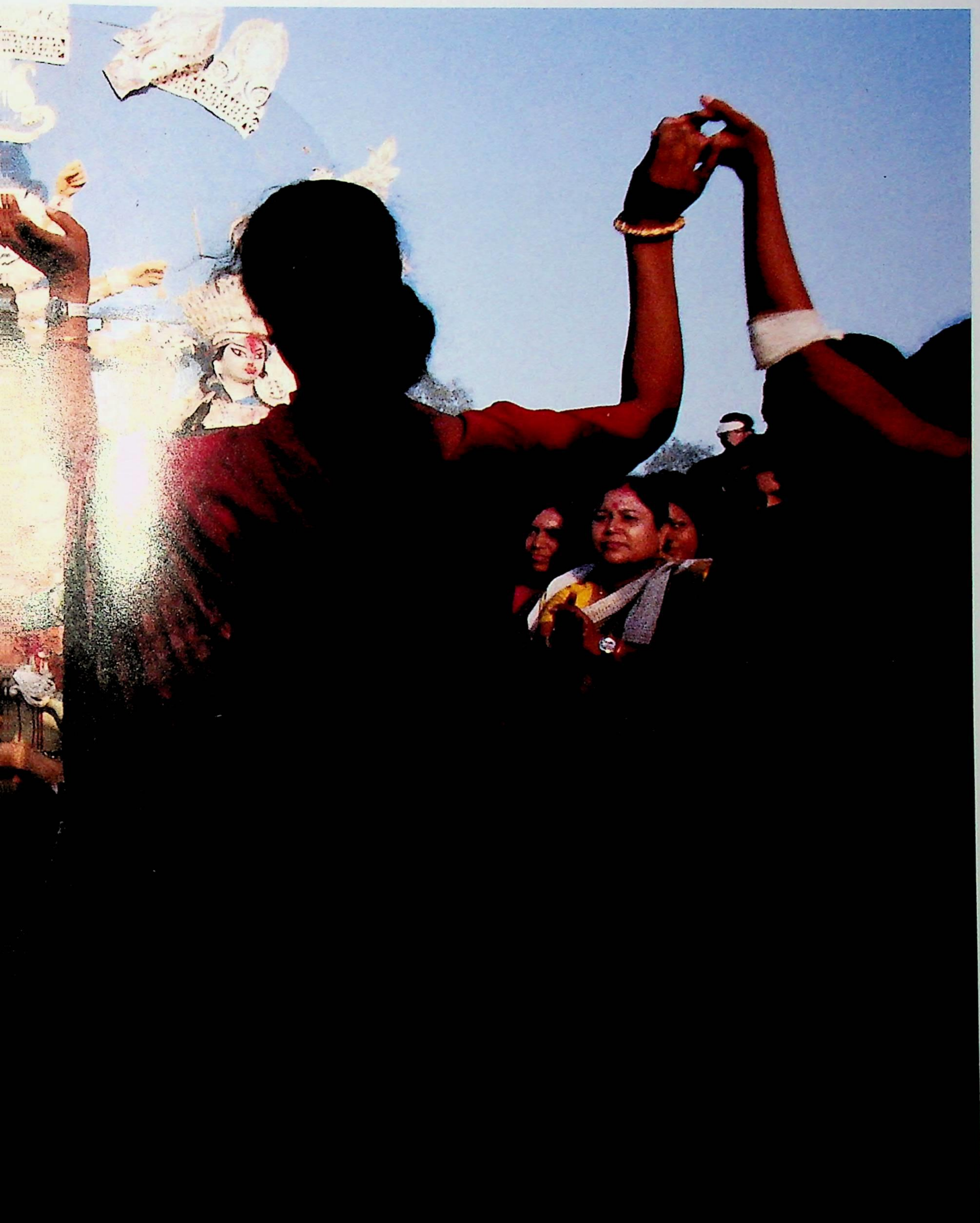
Republic Day: Rashtrapati Bhavan and the Central Secretariat illuminated at night while a peanut-vendor entices sightseeing throngs



The Jama Masjid area: a summer night



Celebrating Durga Puja, an important religious festival of India, particularly for Bengalis

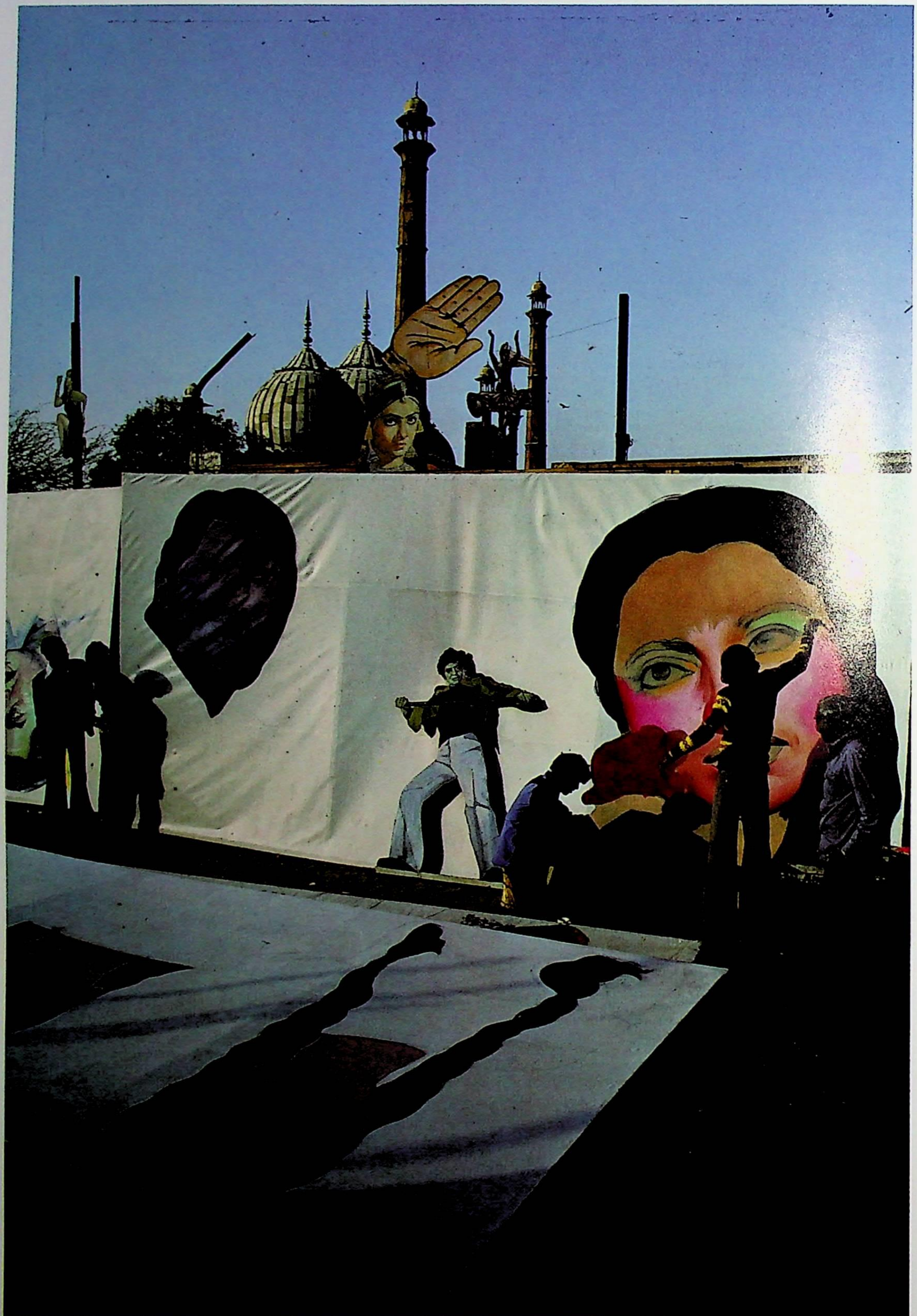




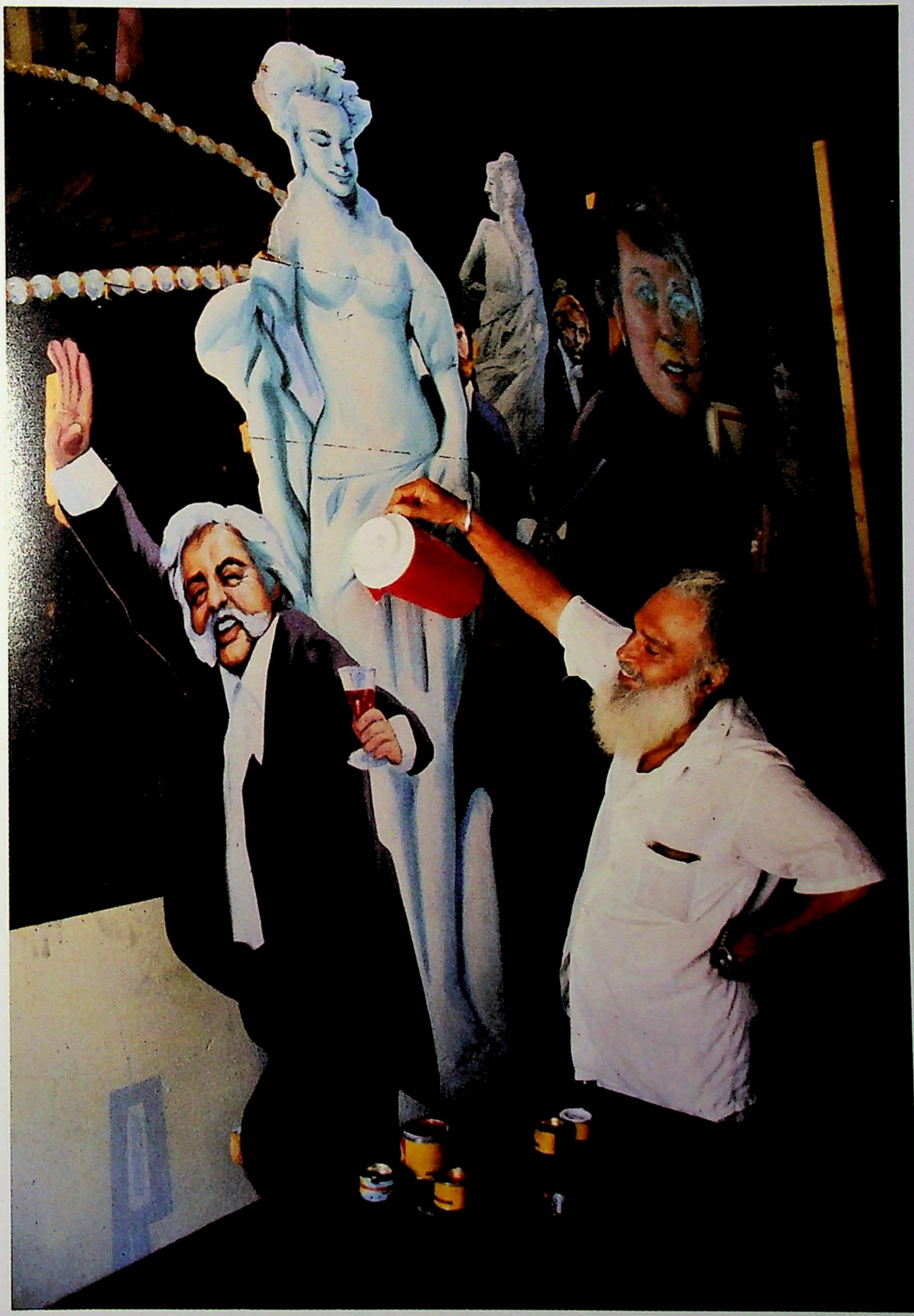
At a fair: black magic holds sway



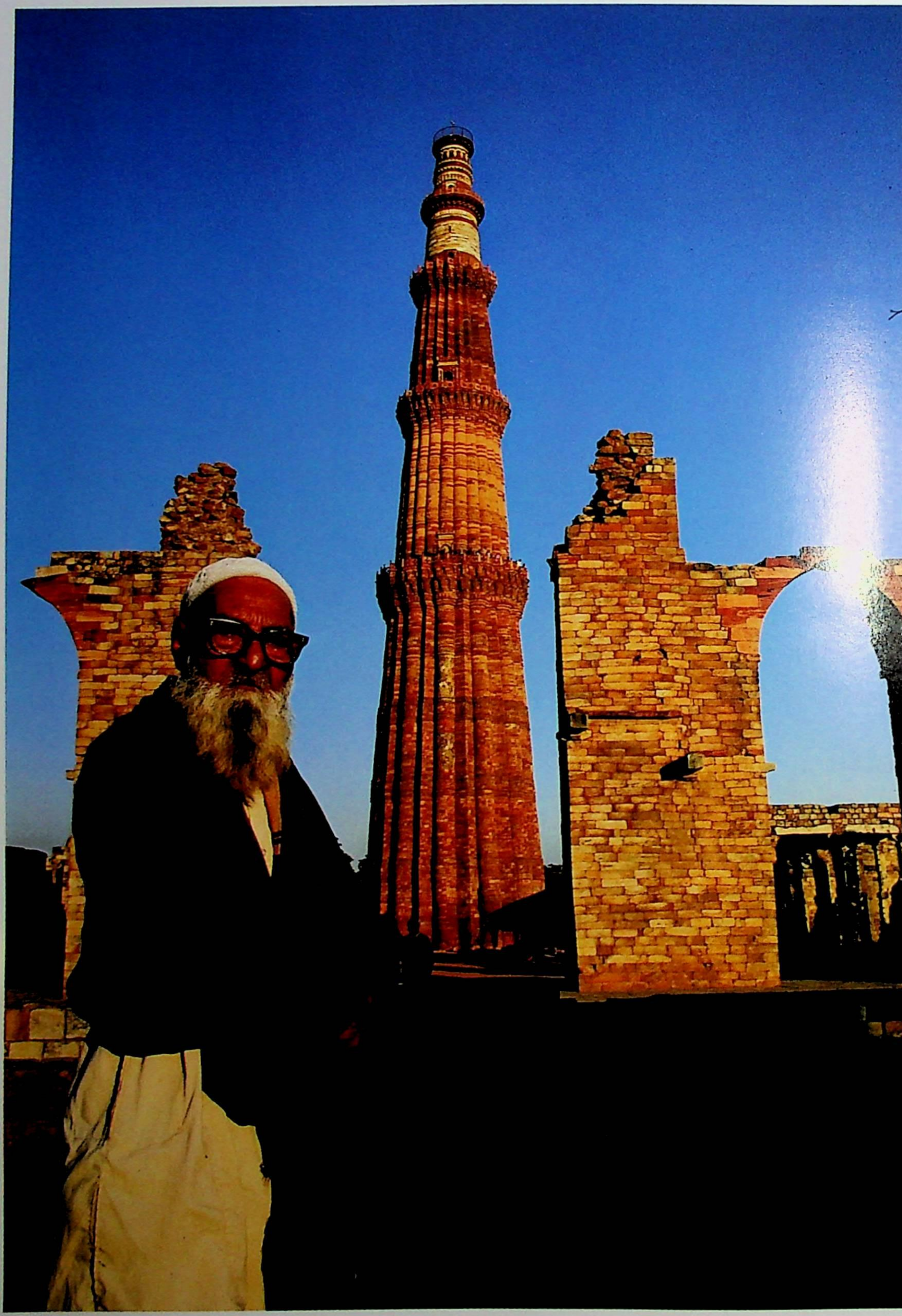
Dussehra celebrations—an important Hindu festival



India has the world's largest film industry, hoardings with larger-than-life stars



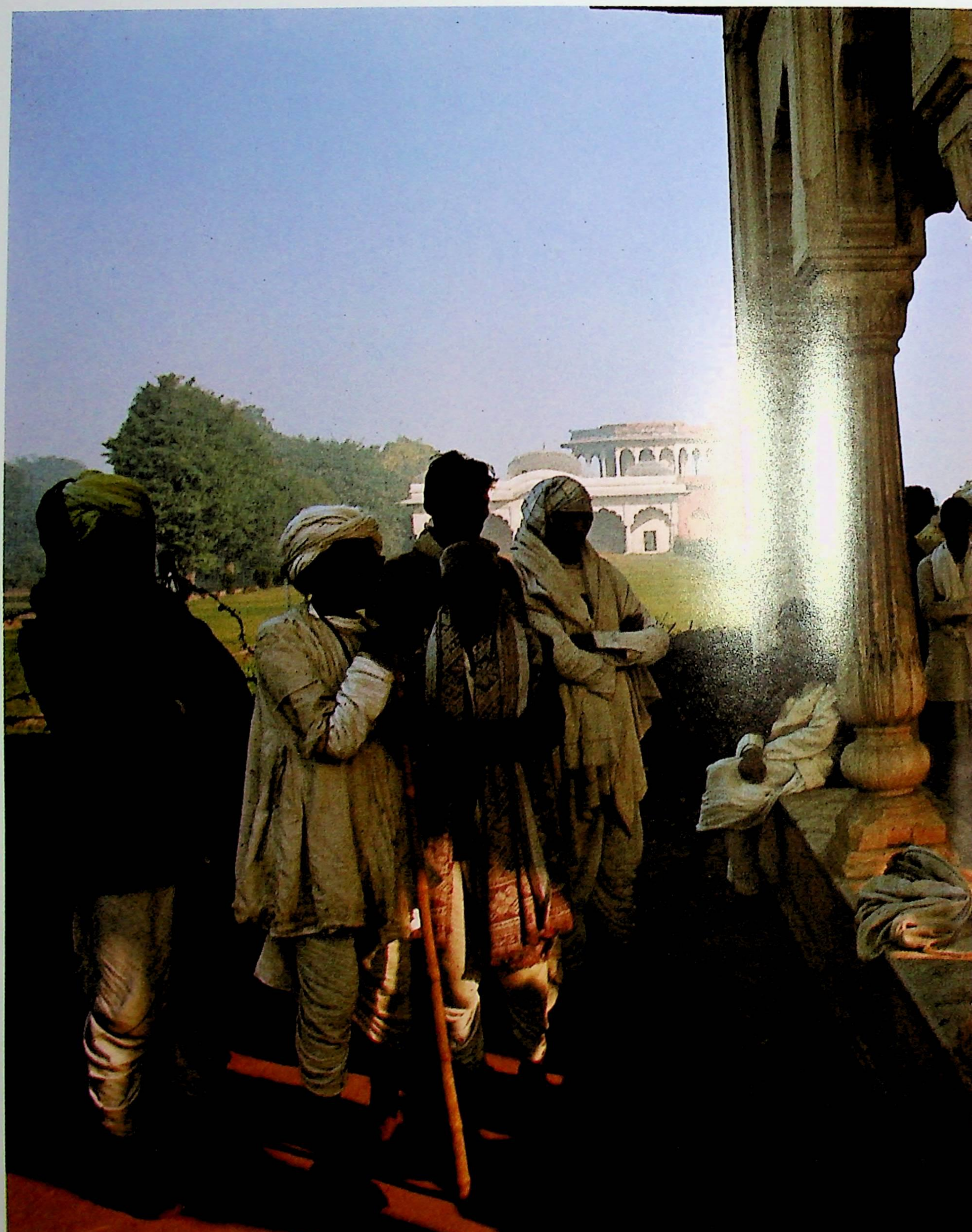
The painters of hoardings create a dream world for millions of film-goers



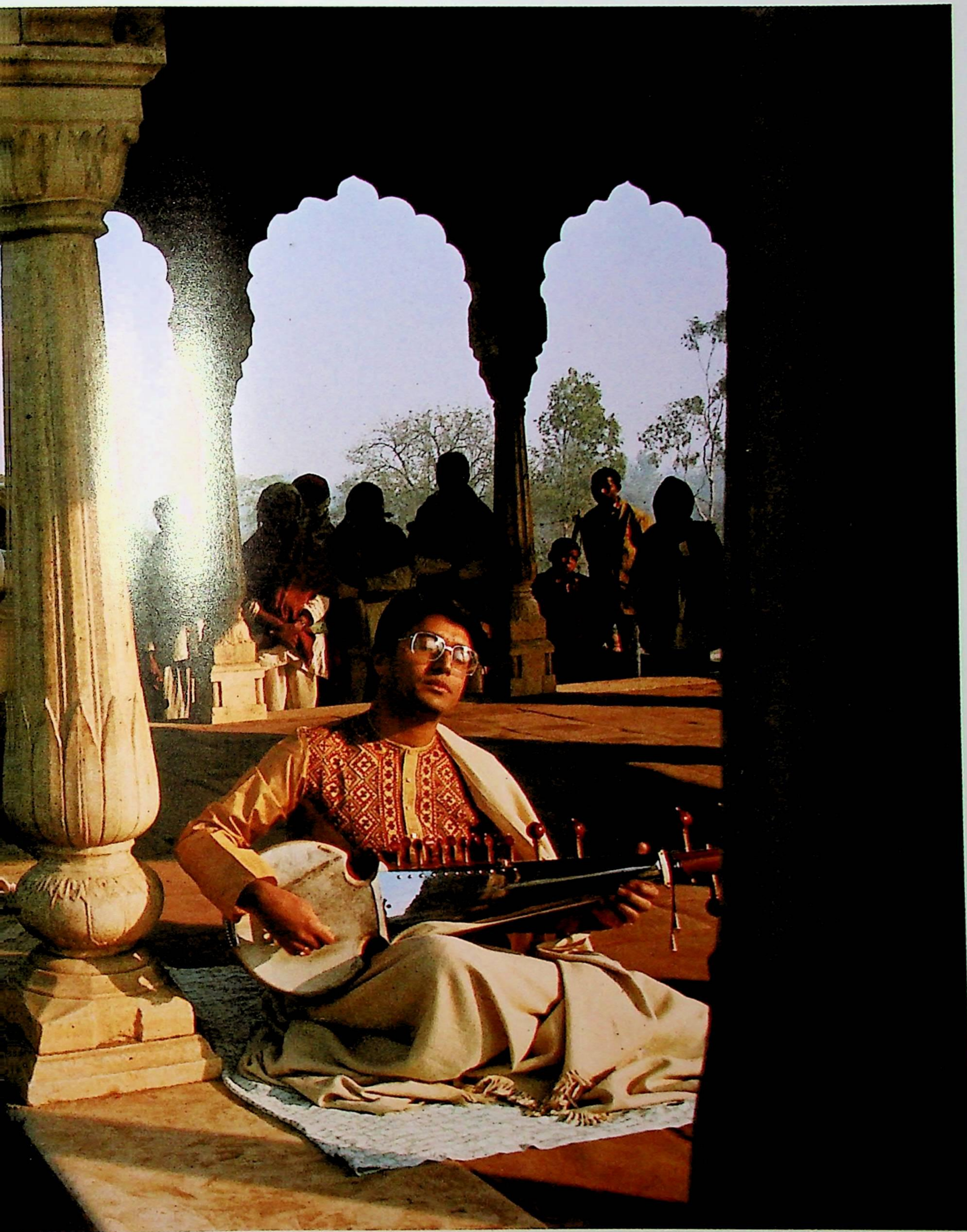
Visitor at the Qutab Minar, Delhi's most spectacular monument

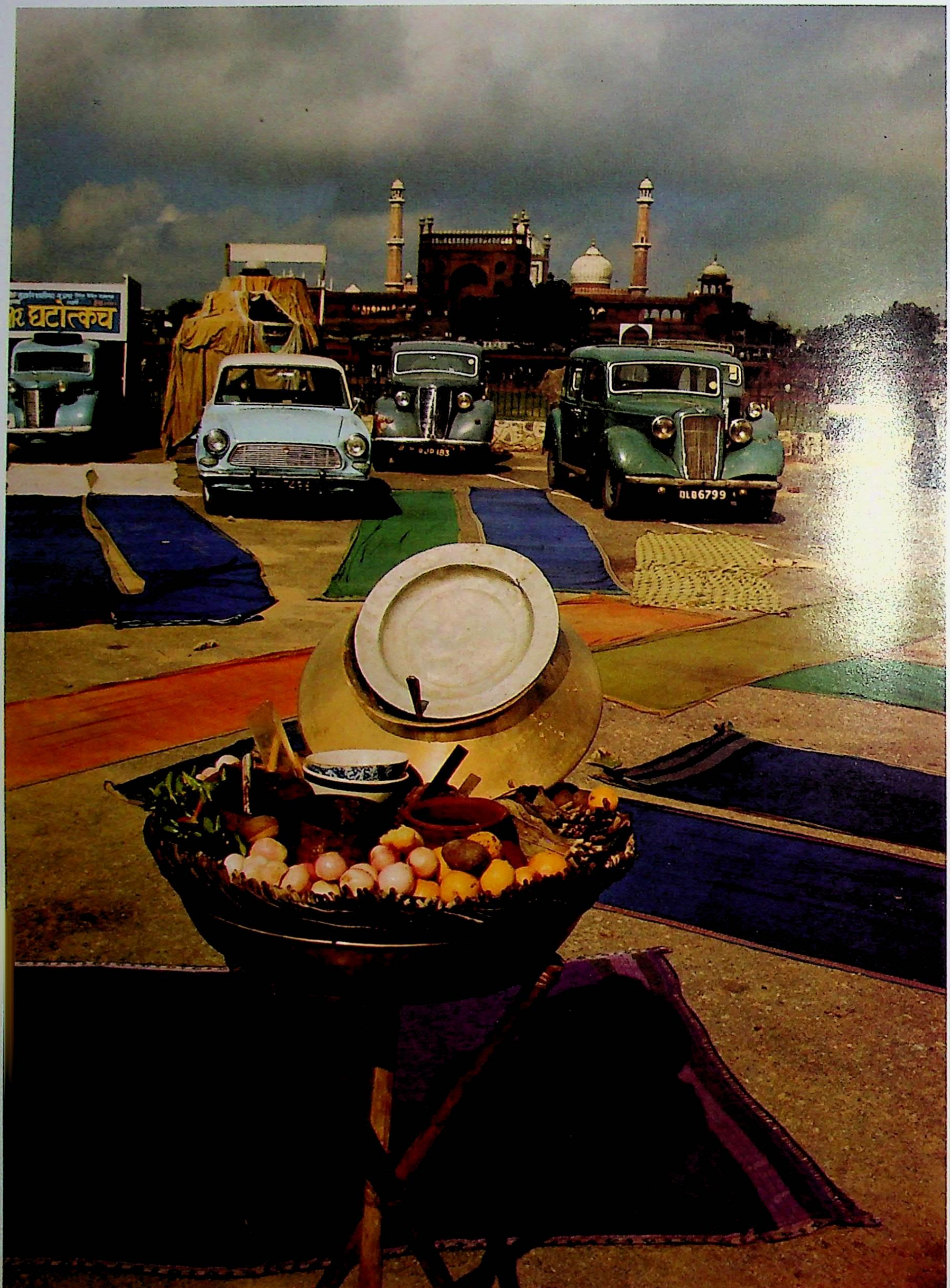


Reflected glory: Safdarjang's Tomb



A noted musician plays the sarod at the Red Fort, built by Shah Jahan

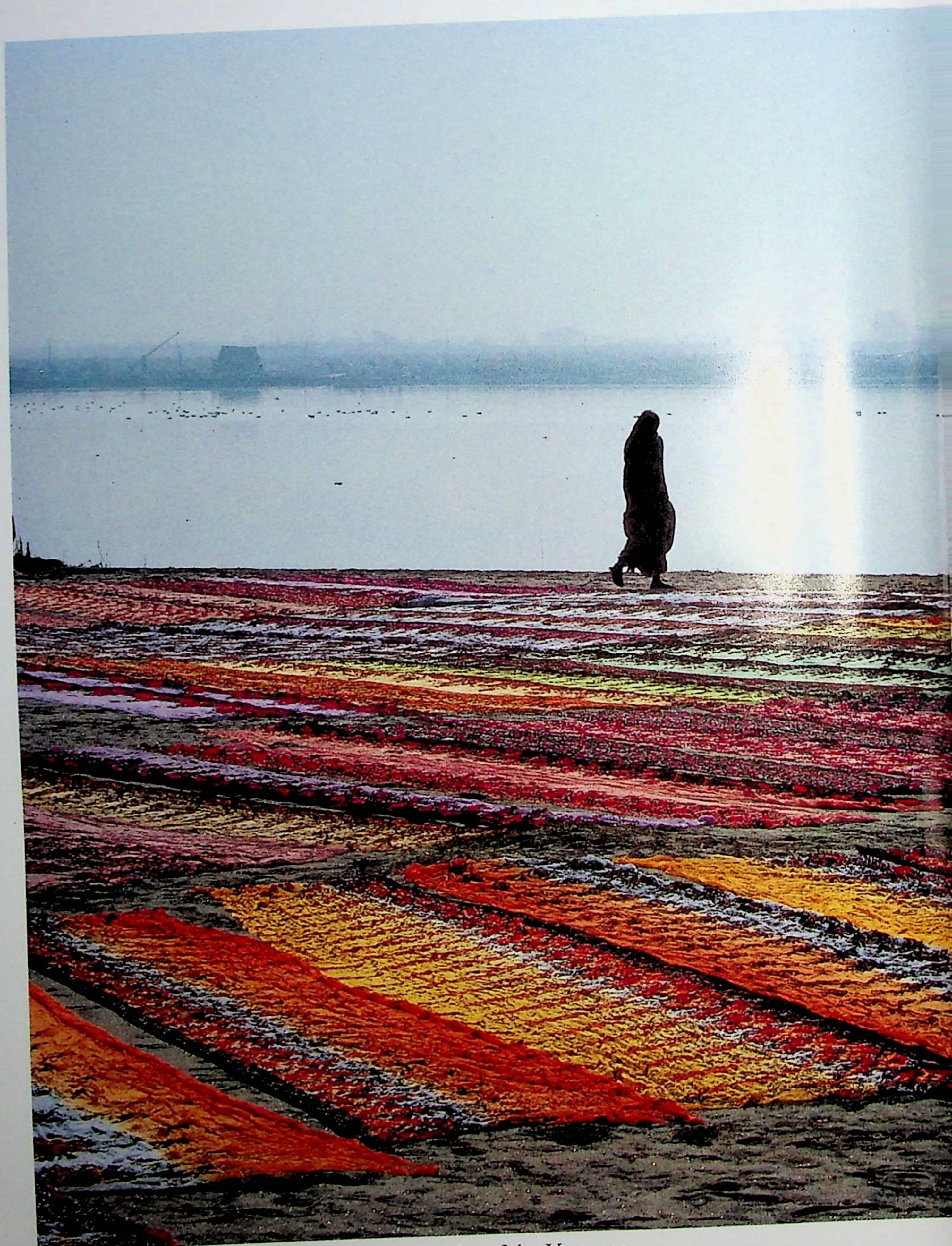




Savouries, dyed saris, vintage cars and the Jama Masjid

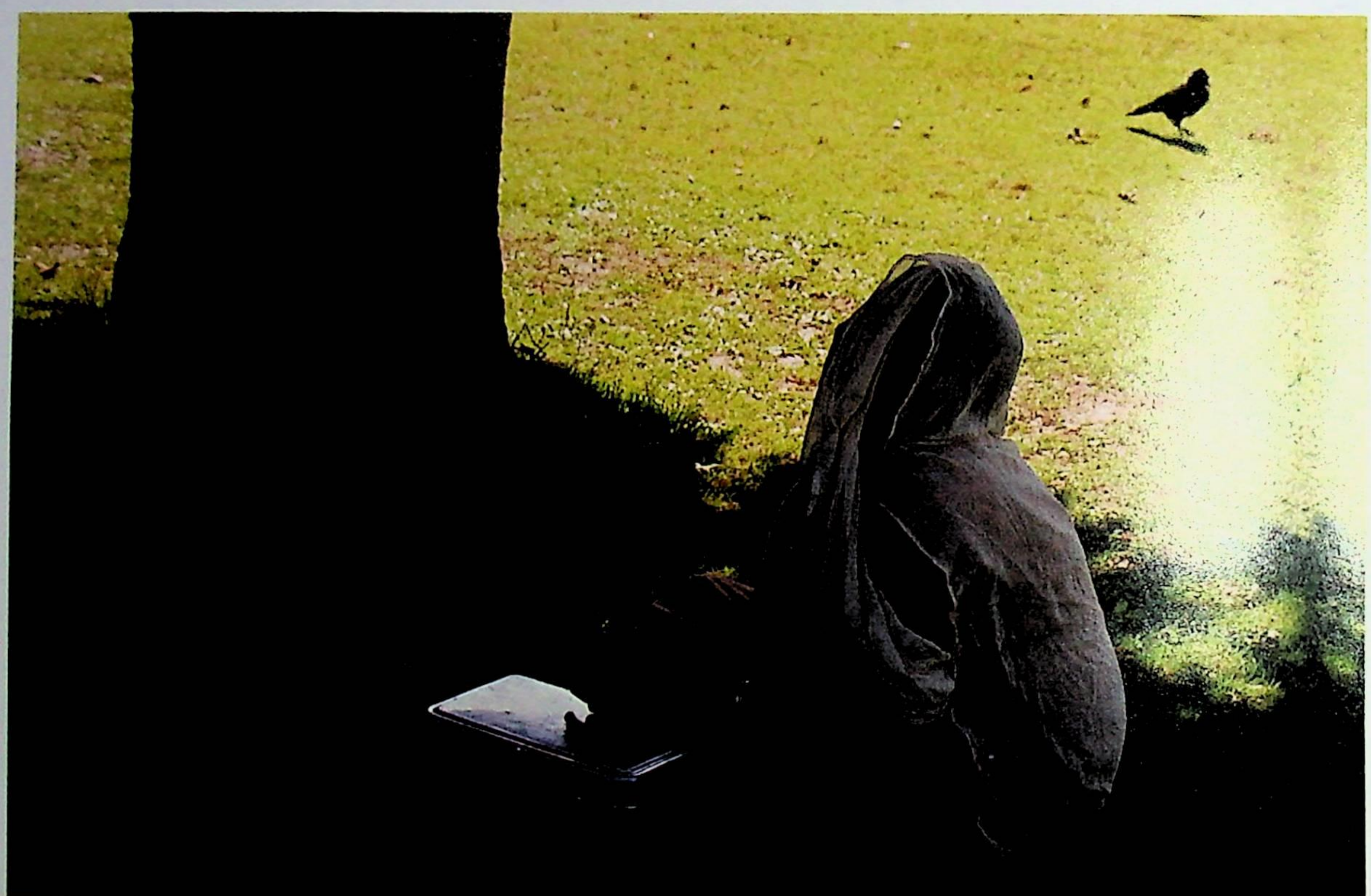


Morning scene near the Yamuna boat-bridge

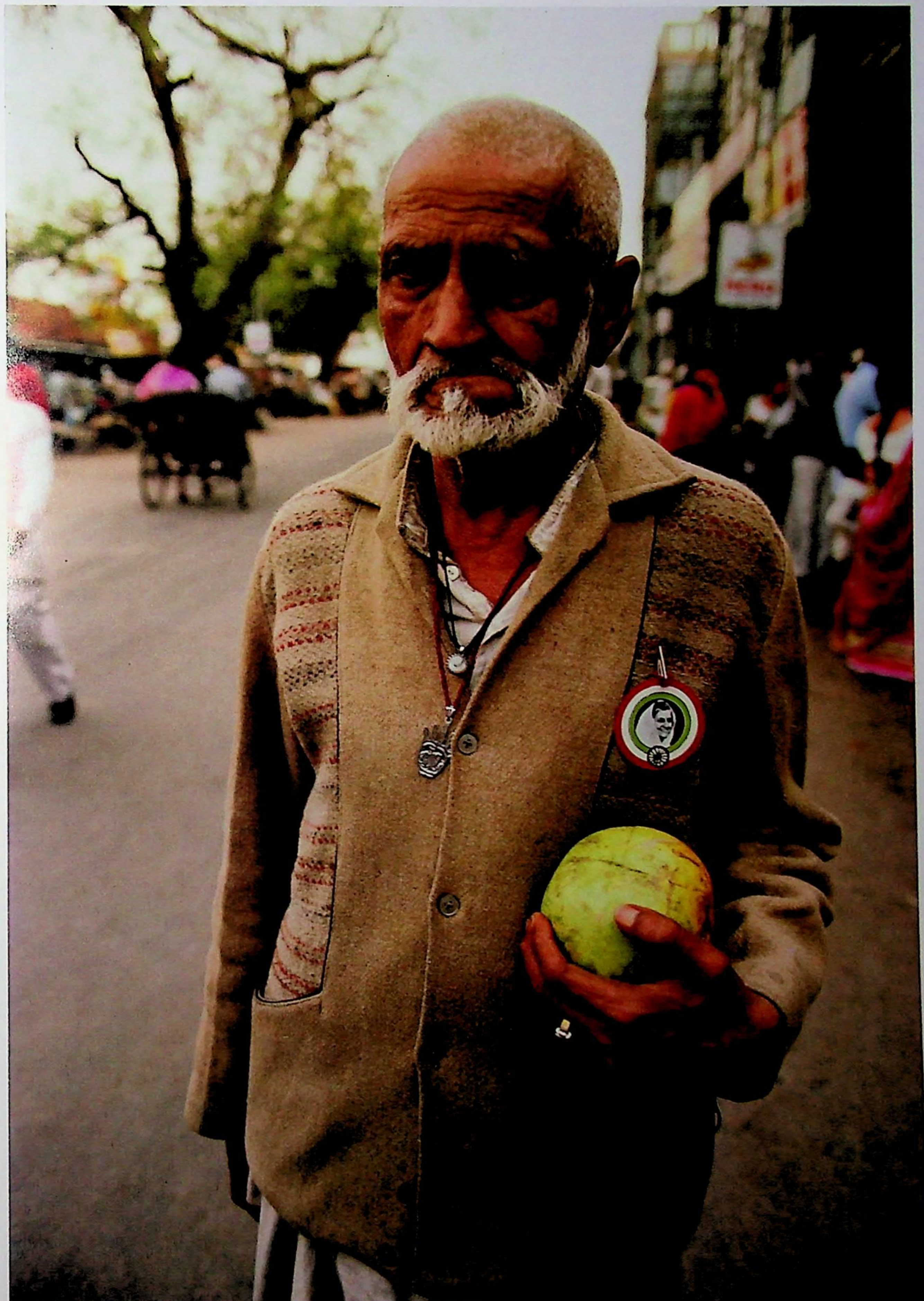


Saris drying on the banks of the Yamuna

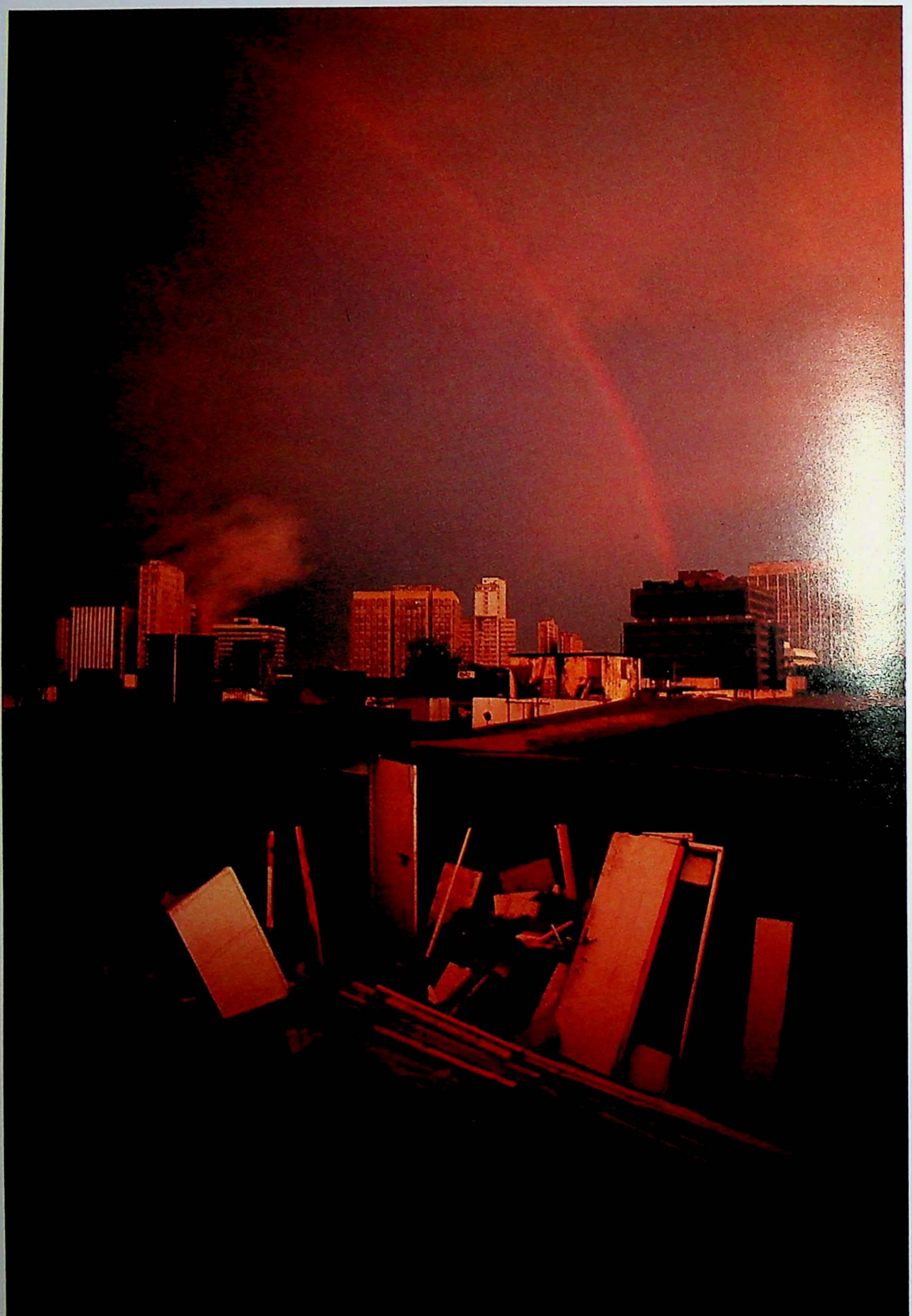




Relaxing in a park.



An inhabitant of Old Delhi



New Delhi's sky-line on a monsoon evening

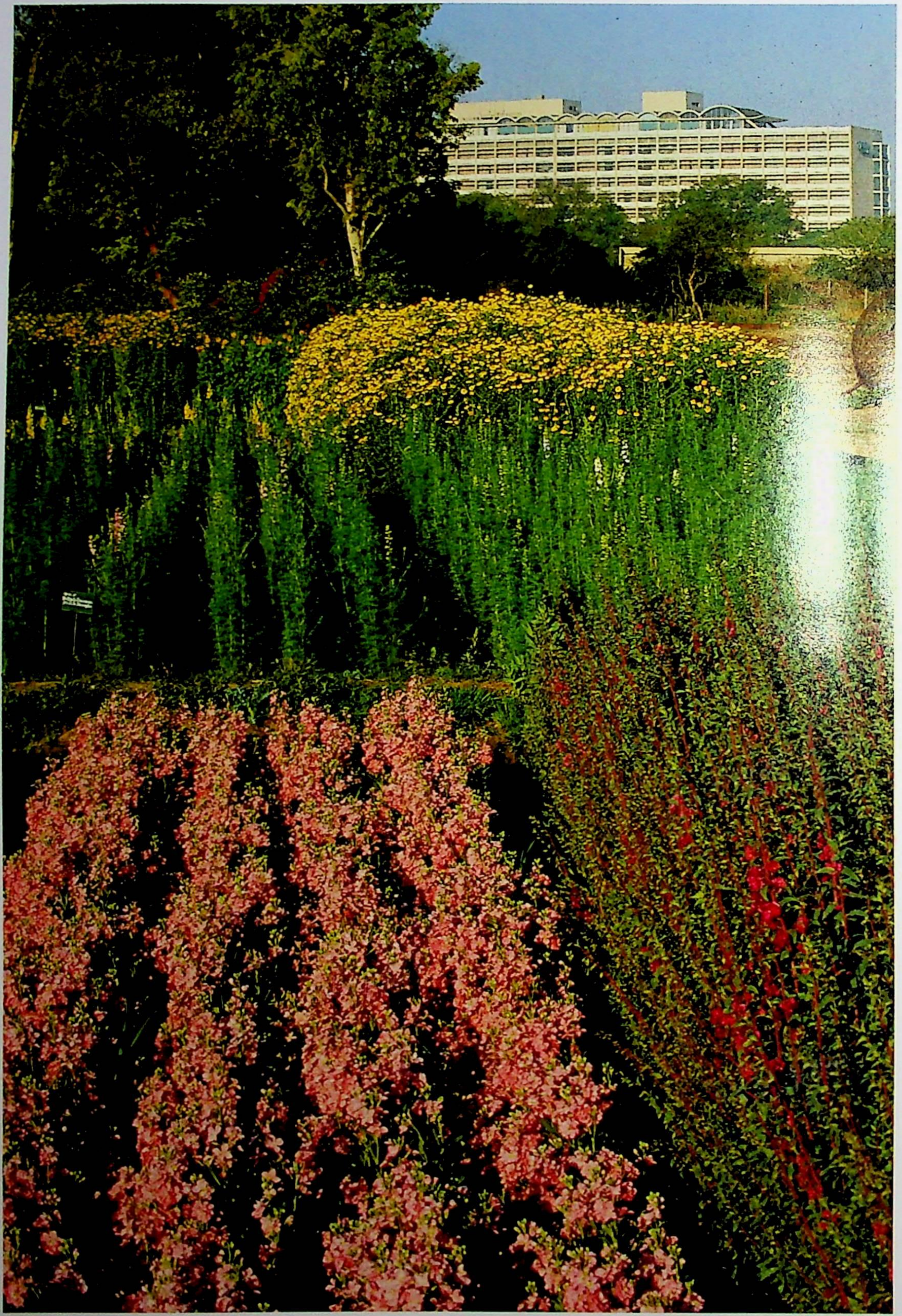


Vikas Minar, Delhi's tallest building, at night



Multi-storeyed housing


ROPAR



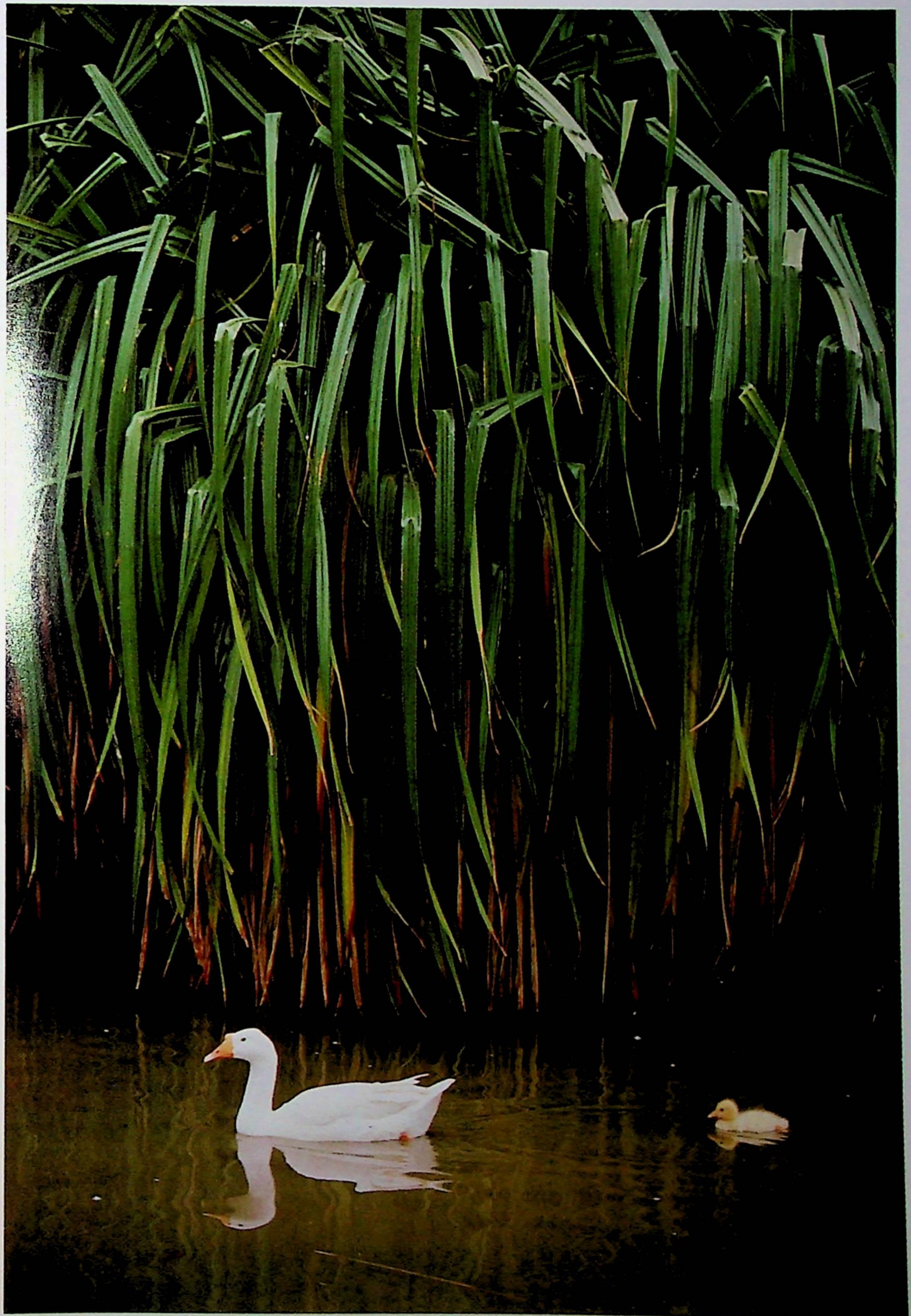
Sundernagar nursery, which serves the city of gardens



Oases of green fields amidst urban expansion



A special attraction at the zoo: the white tigers



A duckling and its mother

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS

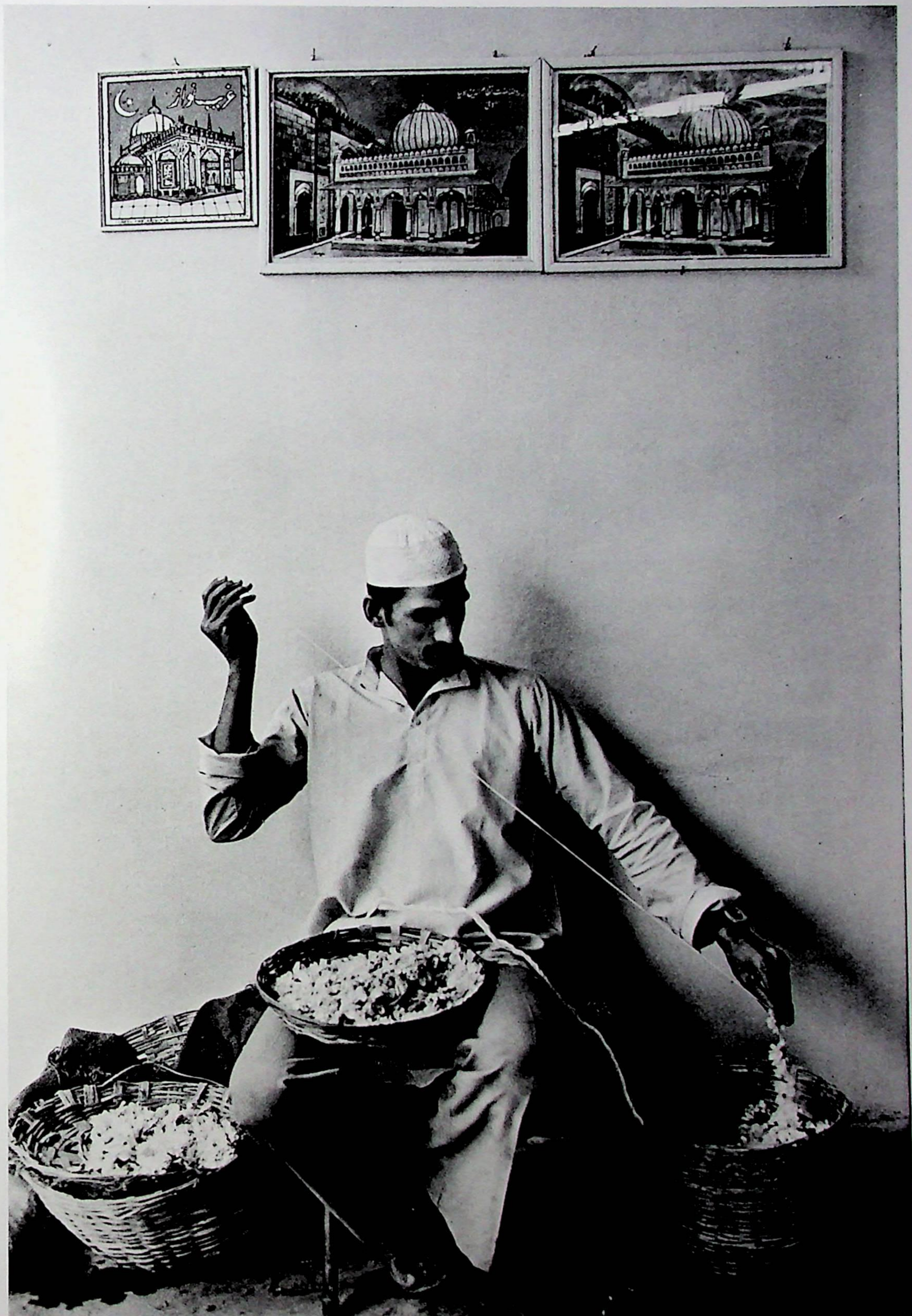


An elegant fourteenth-century structure, Ugrasen's Baoli, situated near Connaught Place





At a cemetry in Nizamuddin, residents live in close association with pigeons



Making flower garlands for the faithful outside the Dargah of Hazrat Nizamuddin

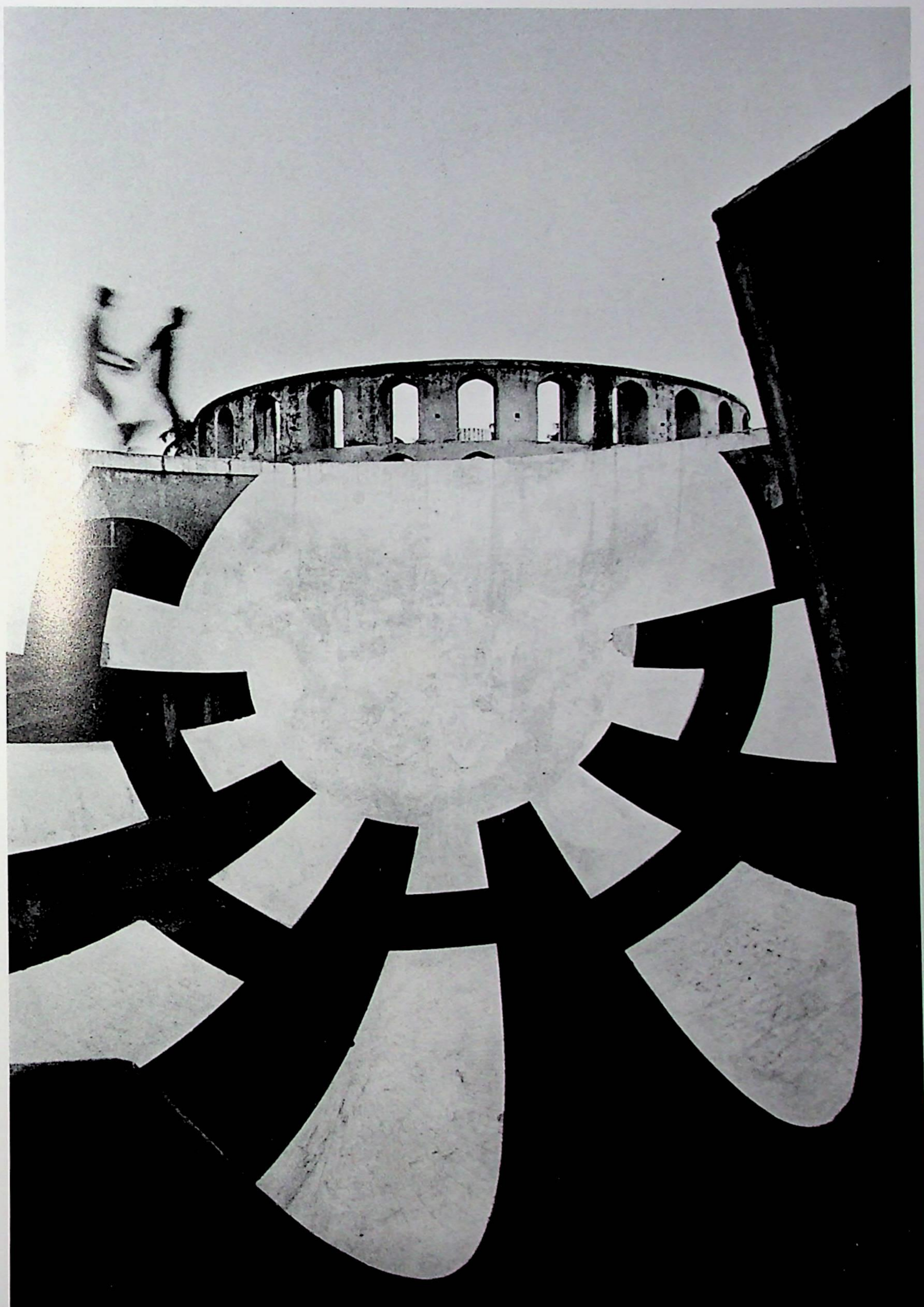


Threshing wheat near Humayun's Tomb (built 1565–73)

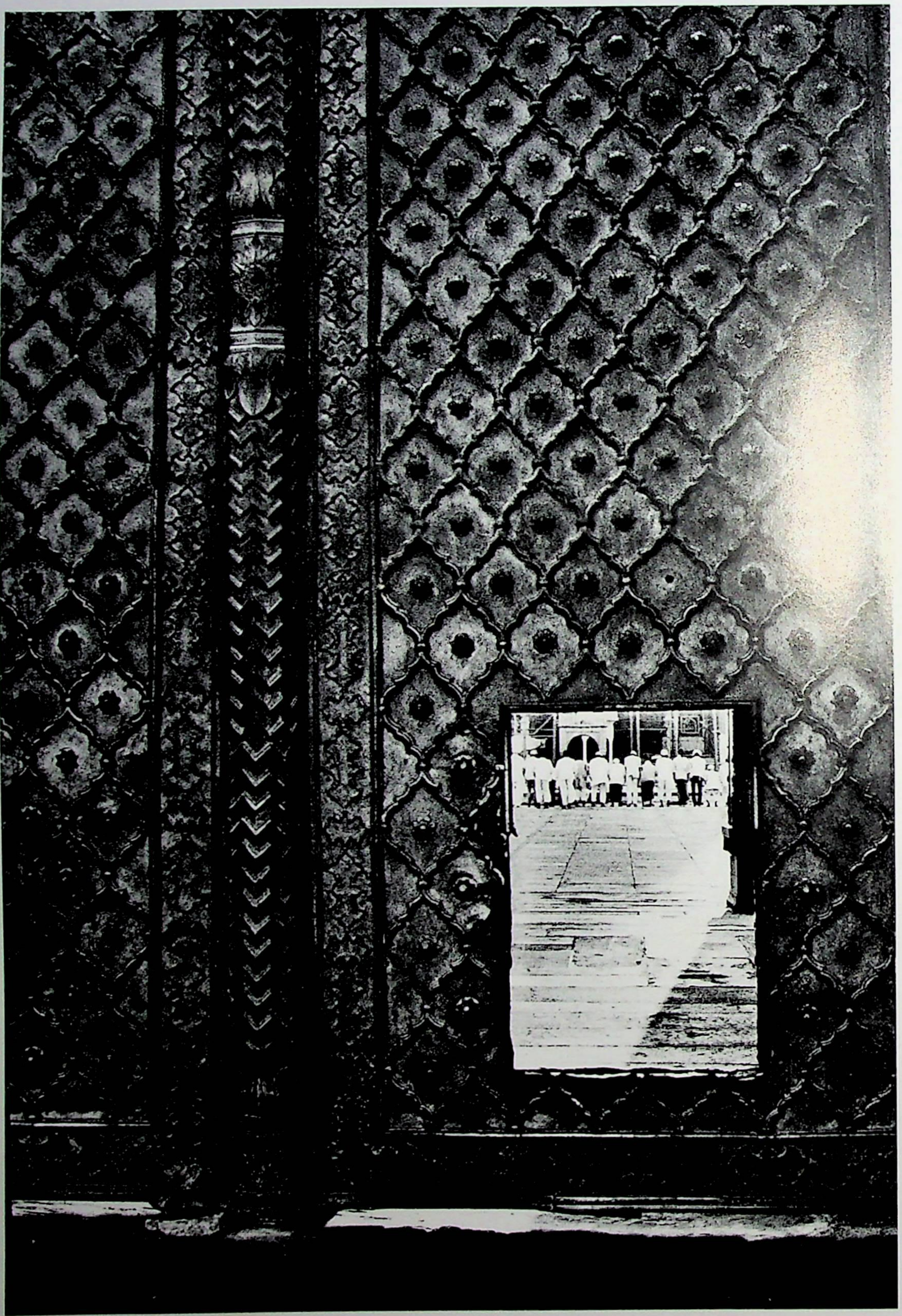




Jantar Mantar, an astronomical observatory built by Maharaja Jai Singh of Jaipur in 1710



The patterns of Jantar Mantar



View through the main door of the Jama Masjid



Morning prayer at the Jama Masjid

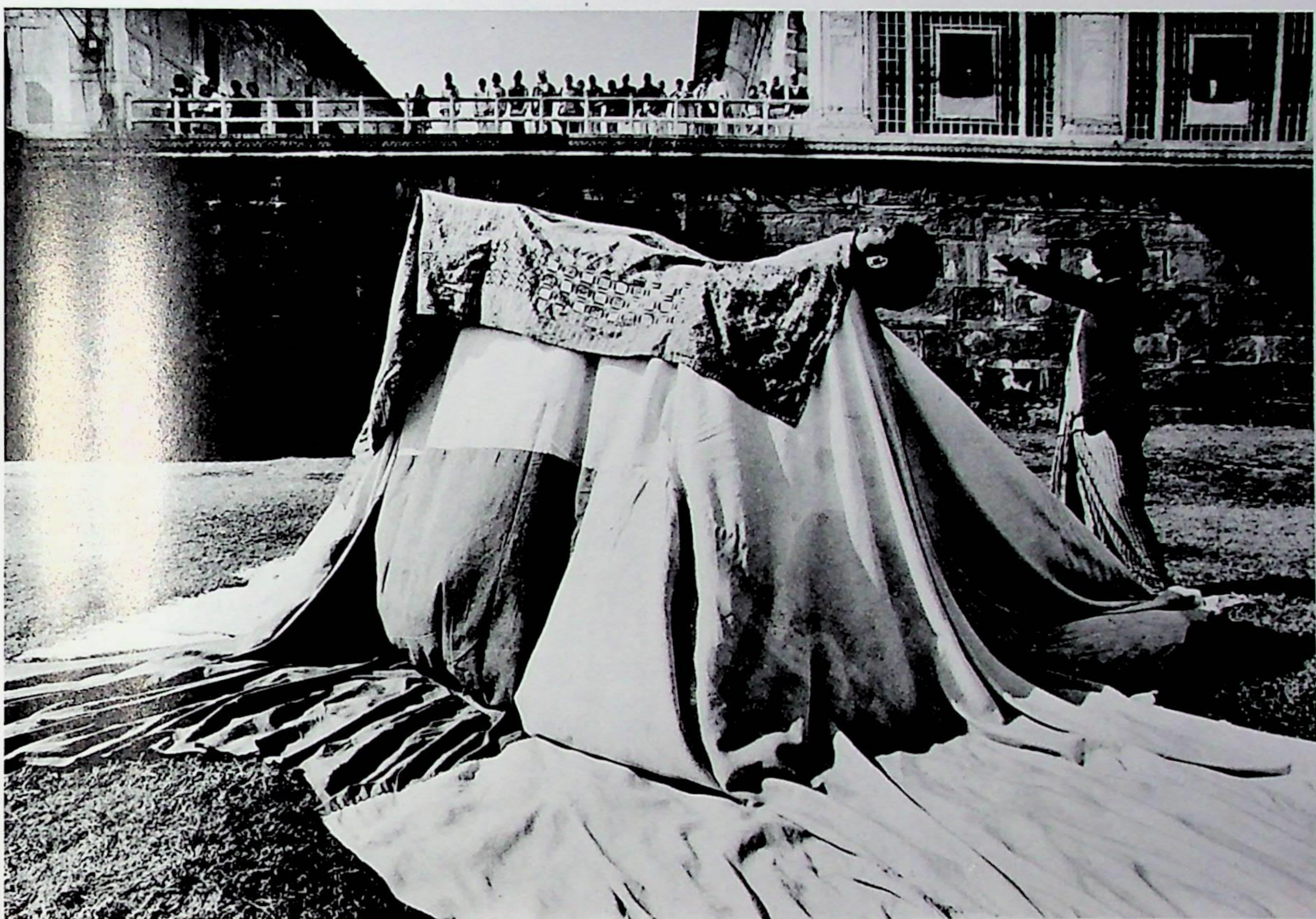


Ruins and rocks near the Qutab Minar





Arches and pillars in the Qutab complex on a monsoon day



Behind the Red Fort: a magician plays to the gallery



Cemetry of the Raj: British statues uprooted after Independence in Coronation Park



St James's: Delhi's first church, built by James Skinner in 1826 near Kashmiri Gate

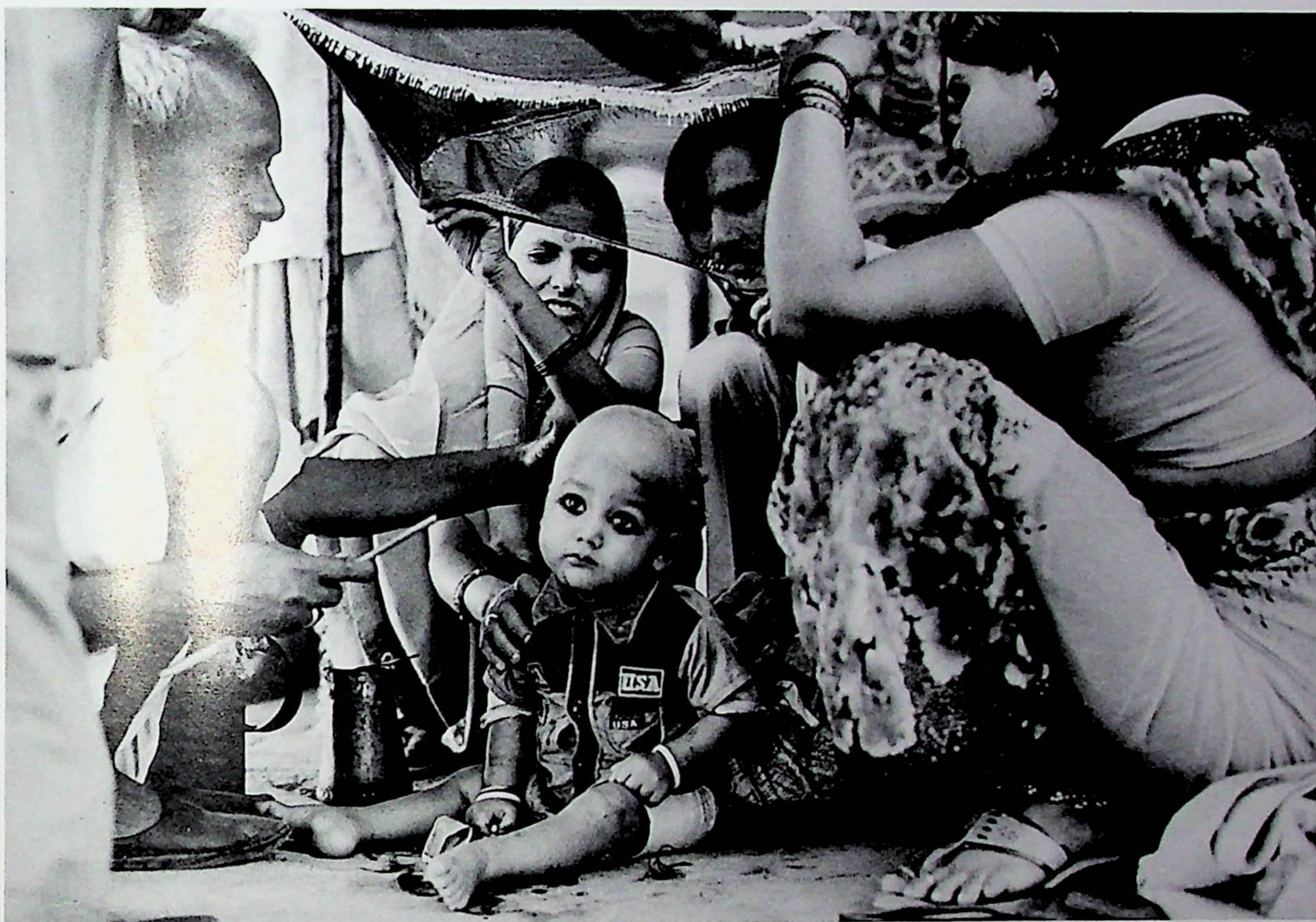


Relaxing near Delhi's largest Hindu temple, Birla Mandir





Gauri Shankar temple in Chandni Chowk thronged with devotees



Mundan, the head-shaving ceremony



People outside a temple





The fury of a Delhi duststorm—frequent during May and June



A broken branch too heavy to carry



Summer vacations: fun and games with a frisky calf





The blessed relief of the first monsoon shower after a scorching summer



The city during a heavy monsoon shower

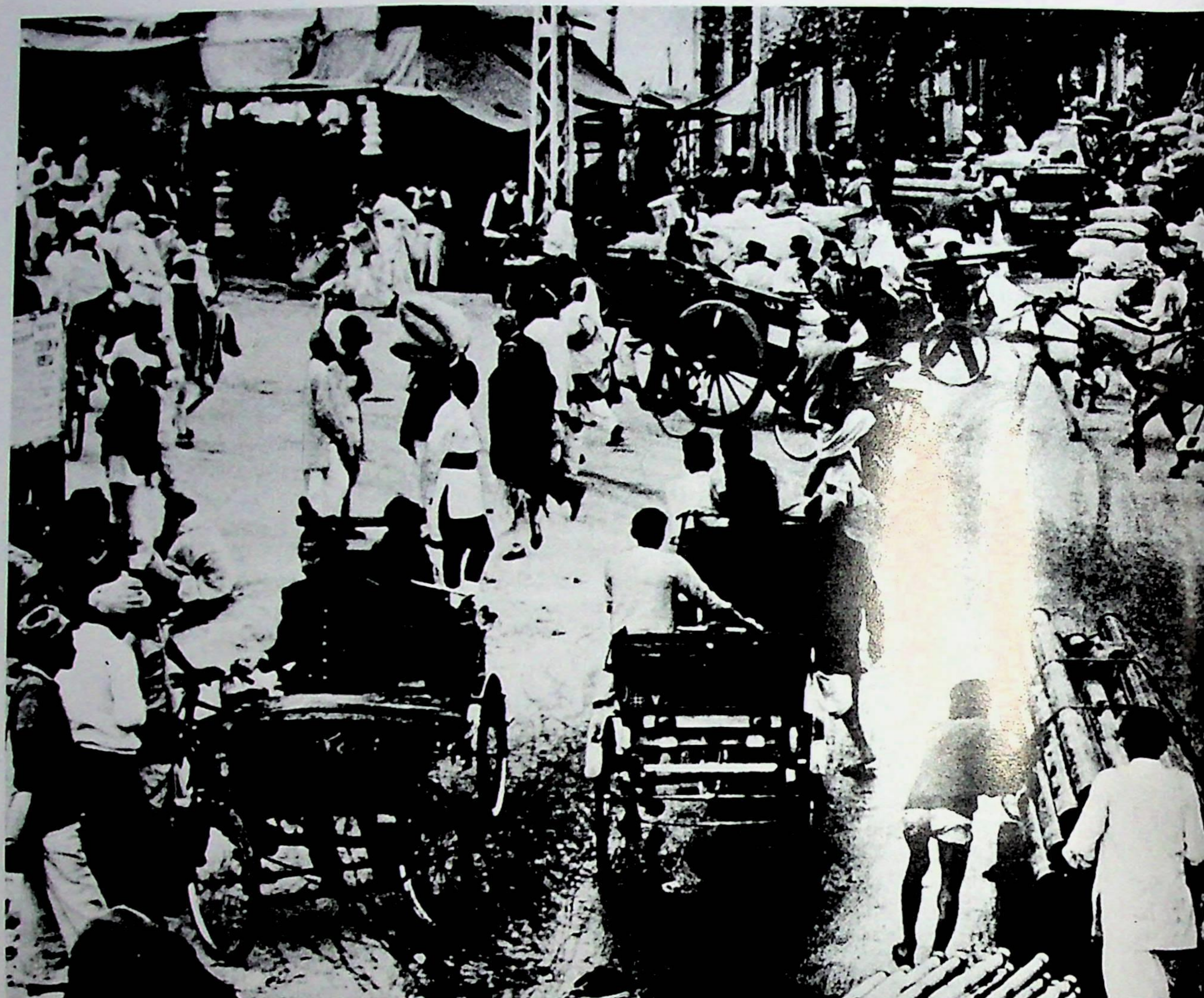


A commercial area of the city, immediately after office hours





Horse-drawn carts are still popular in Old Delhi, but stubborn at times



A bewildering variety of traffic at the Chawri Bazar crossing in Old Delhi





This office-goer cannot afford to miss his bus



Trying to secure a toehold on an overcrowded bus





At a crossing . . .





. . . in the centre of the city, Connaught Place



In a government office: harassed clerks, mountains of paperwork and yards of red tape

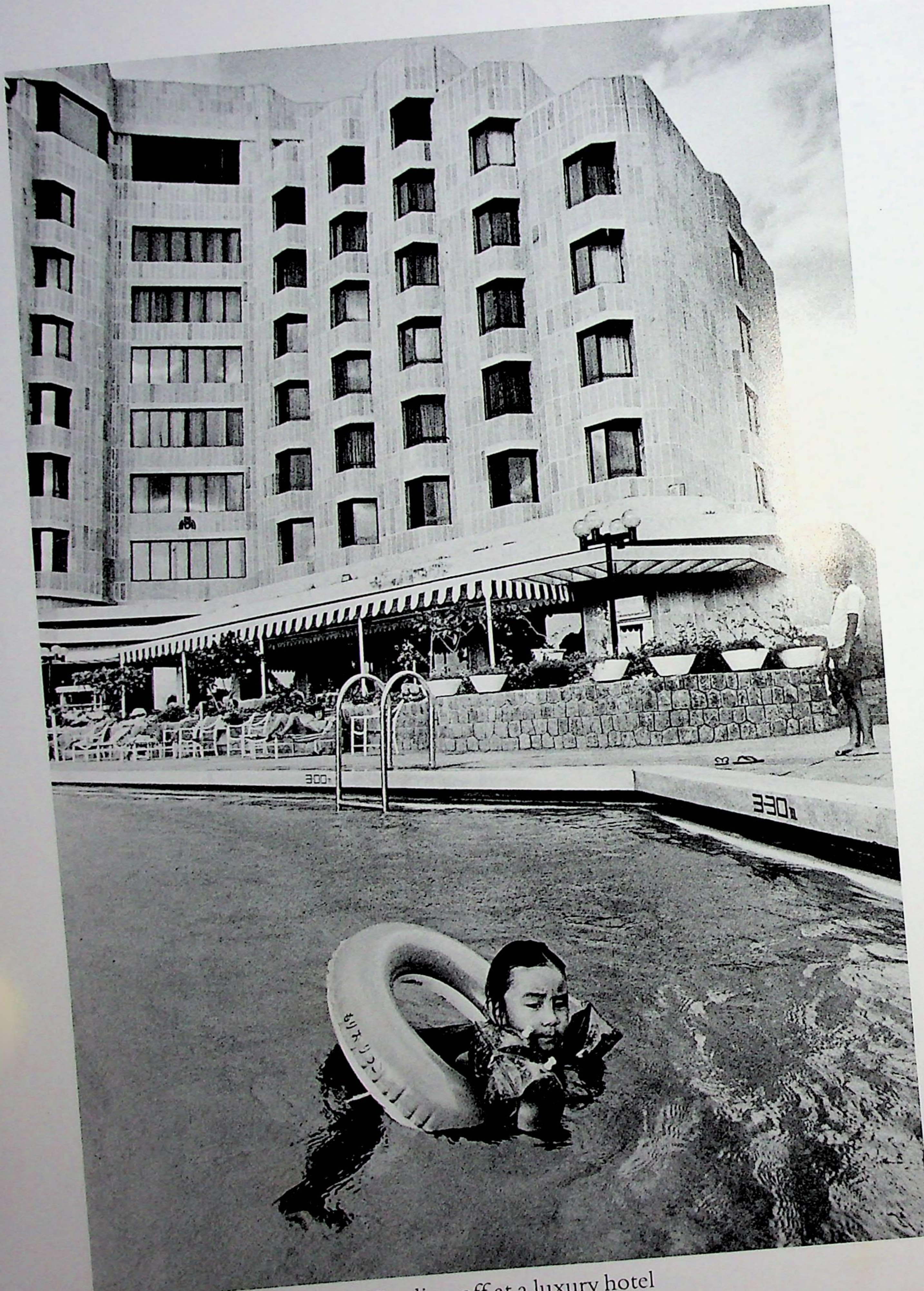


During the lunch break, a chess game on the lawns of Central Park in Connaught Place



Lanes behind high-rise apartments, where clothes dry and children play





Cooling off at a luxury hotel

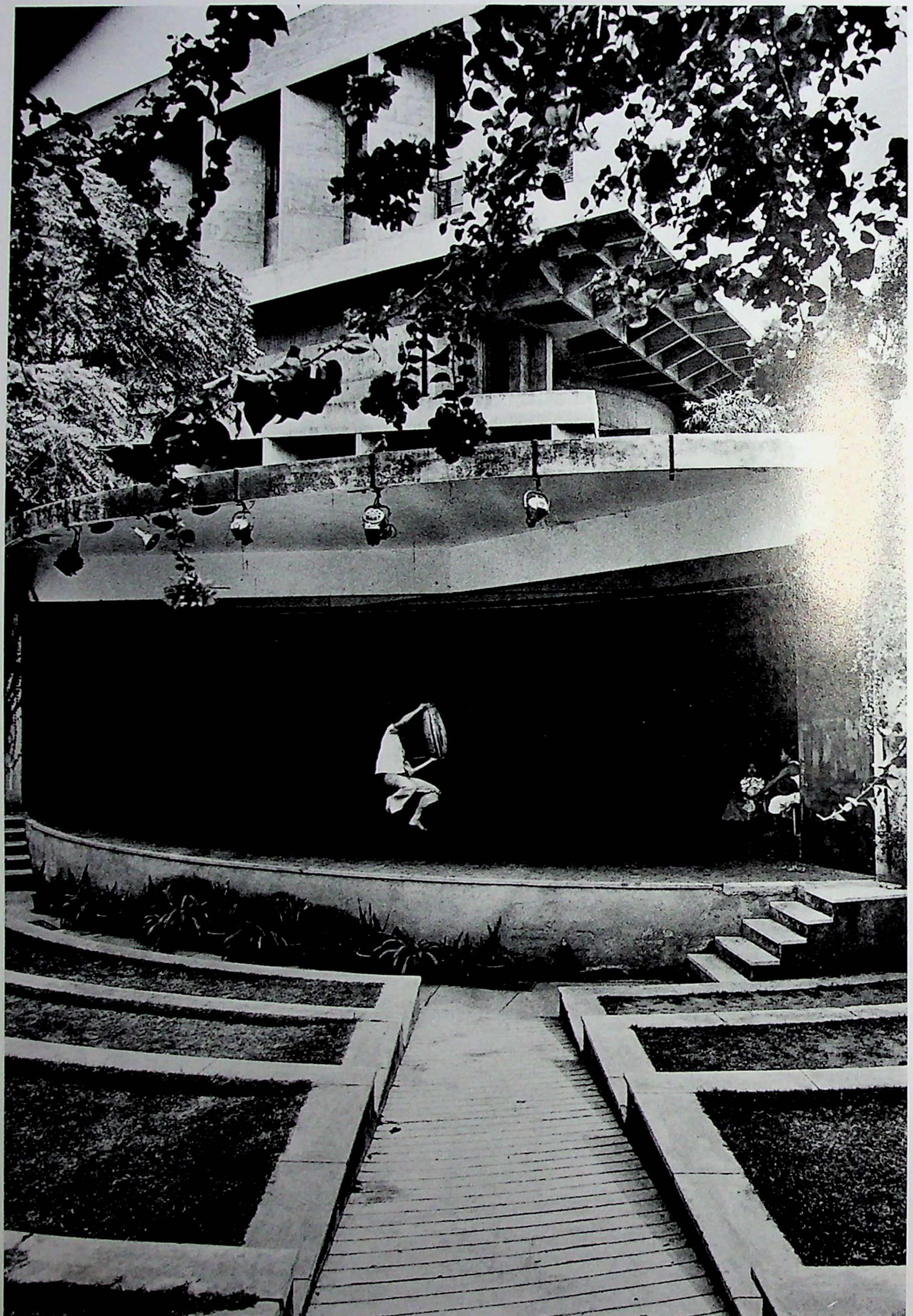


Office workers, children and their pets stretch out on the lawns of Central Park



View from a construction site





An agile Manipuri drum-dancer rehearsing in an open-air theatre



Another kind of culture—cabaret dancers in the discotheque of a five-star hotel



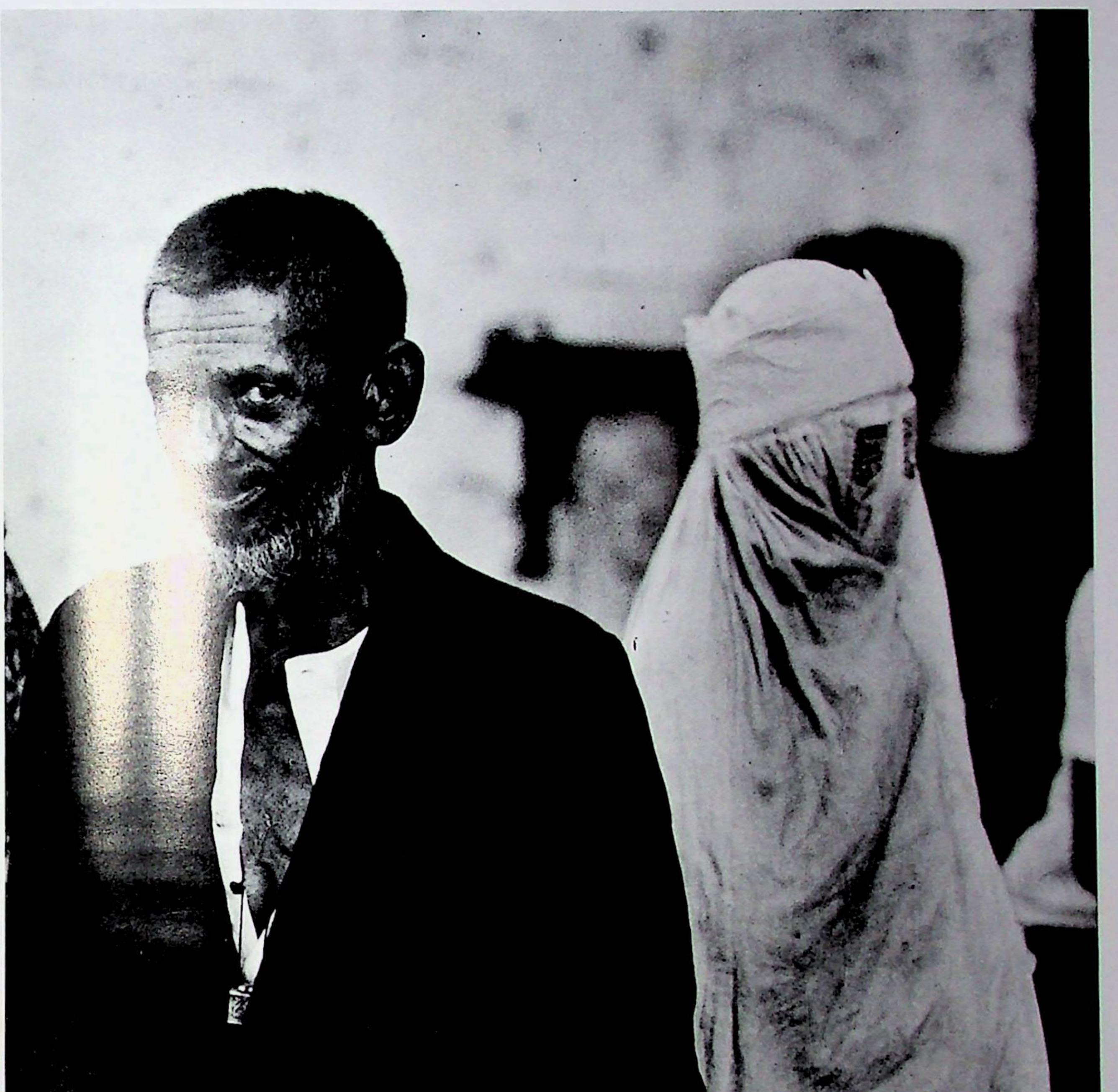
In the hard labour of construction work, men and women are equal



An island of calm in a bustling modern city



A woman carrying her shopping bag



A couple in Chawri Bazar



People from different worlds, Old Delhi



آج کی تازہ خبر!


A clock repairer of Old Delhi

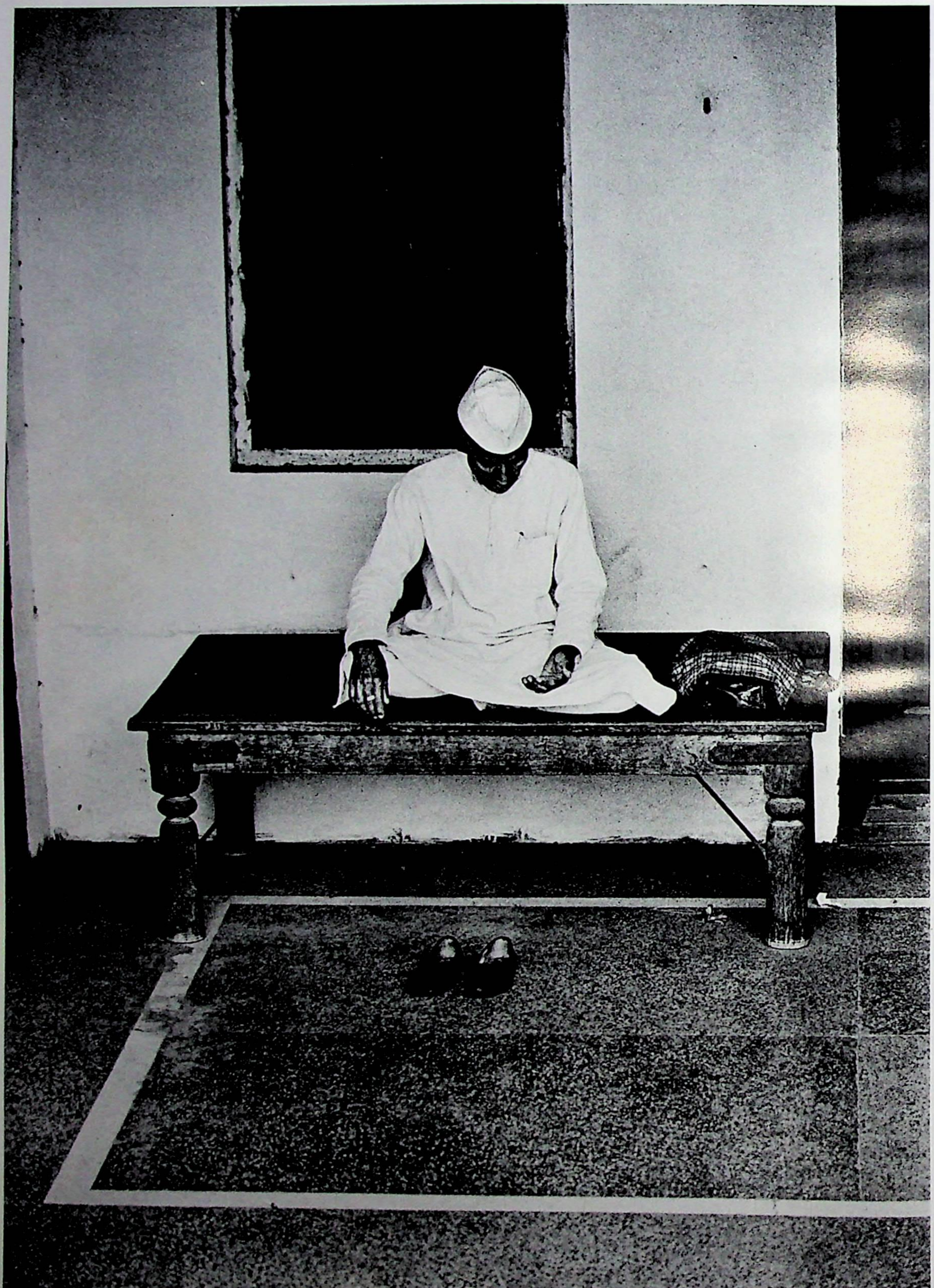


A road-side photographer



A familiar street scene around Turkman Gate





A palm-gazer



A prosperous dhoti-clad 'Dilli-wallah'



In the bustle of the evening bazar at Chandni Chowk, a shopkeeper sits relaxed





Evening prayer




K. LALITA
4-12-80


DELHI